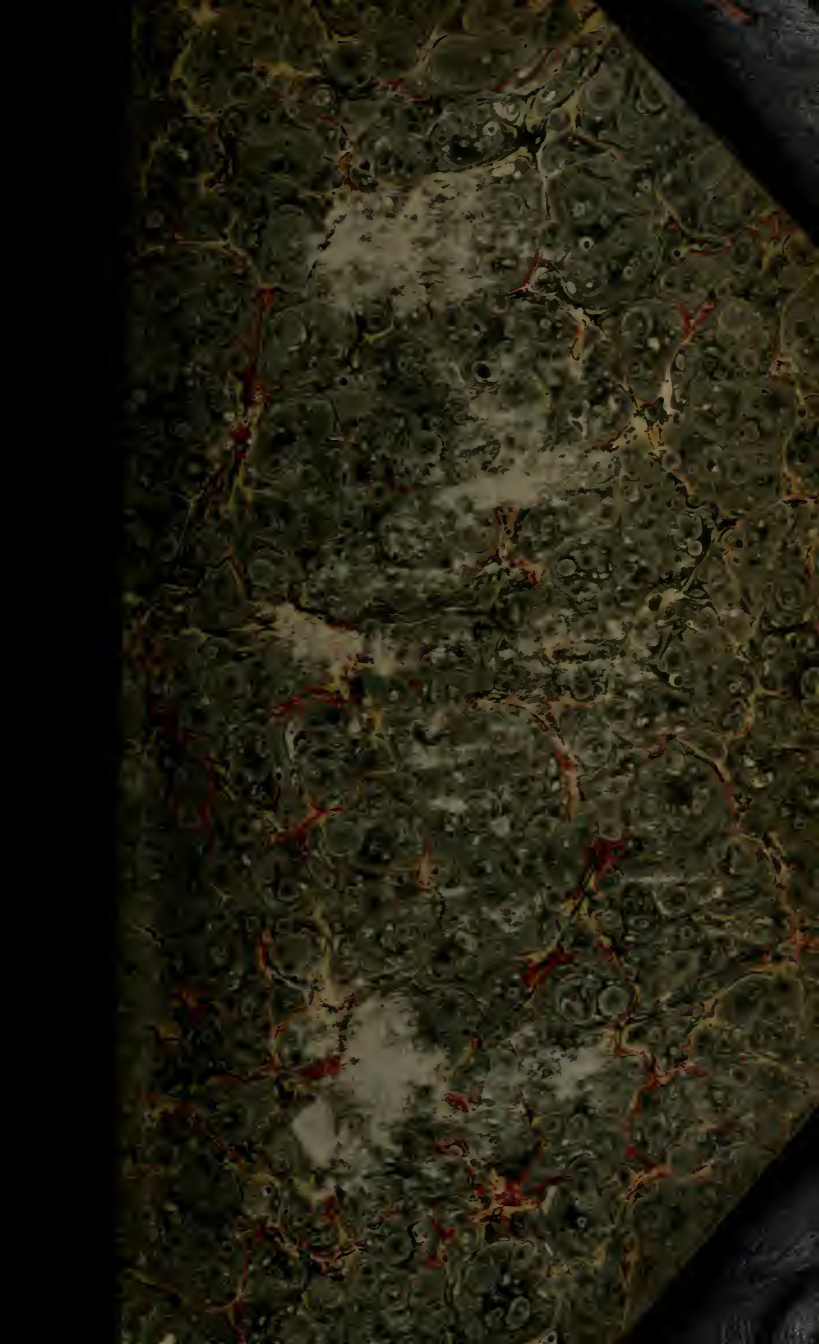






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A D È L È.

A TALE.

BY

JULIA KAVANAGH,

AUTHOR OF

“NATHALIE,” “RACHEL GRAY,”

&c. &c.

“She dwelt among the untrodden ways.

A maid, whom there were none to praise,
And very few to love.”—WORDSWORTH.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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1858.

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A D È L E.

CHAPTER I.

REPENTANCE.

MADAME GÉRARD went up to Alice, and took her hand.

“My dear child,” she said, “God loves you, for He has chastised you sorely.”

Alice looked at her like one bewildered.

“What do you mean?” she asked. “What has happened? Nothing has happened to me. My husband is well—well and strong, and he will be back in a few moments.”

“Poor thing! poor thing!” said Madame Gérard, gently stroking her hand; “poor thing! why did you marry? Life is short and perishable; the strong, the robust, are called away in their strength and without warning.”

“I understand—my husband is dead,” said Alice. Madame Gérard did not answer; Alice laid her head on the shoulder of Adèle, and seemed unable to weep, unable to speak, unable to feel.

At length she roused herself.

“Where is he?” she asked.

Madame Gérard took her hand and led her out of the room into a neighbouring apartment, where Monsieur Lascours had been laid. He had dropped down dead in one of the streets of Nantua; a doctor was passing by and bled him at once, but uselessly. Other means were tried, and they proved as vain. At length he was borne inanimate and cold to that home which a few hours before he had left in all the strength of life, full of projects for a morrow he was never to behold. They had laid him on a low, long couch in his sitting-room; on a table near him burned a candle, that flared in the wind of the half-open door; its flickering flame played changingly on the still, white hair, on the pallid brow, on the rigid features which the divine light of life, the spark of heaven, had deserted. Calm and placid as the face of a child looked the face which in life had worn a mien stern, spite its kindness; the sealed lid veiled the keen, brown eye, Adèle had half dreaded; a smile no longer sarcastic, but serenely sweet, rested on the pale lips. Alice sunk on her knees by her dead husband's side; she raised his cold hand to her lips, she cried with passionate sorrow, “Forgive me! forgive me, Henri!” Vain cry of a tardy repentance. What we do, we do for ever; a thought so awful, that the bravest heart dare not linger upon it, either when the deed is done, or when it is yet to do. Alice did not dare to call back, even with a thought, the seven years she had given to that unloved husband. She did not dare to dwell on the

bitter confessions of that evening, the repining words of one who had suffered much, but words uttered when he against whom they were spoken had already by his death freed her from her bondage. She did not dwell upon them, she did not recall them, but they came back uncalled.

She dropped the hand which would never more offend hers by too fond a pressure ; she rose like one distracted, she clasped her hands together, and she uttered broken and passionate exclamations, which Adèle, who stood by her side, alone overheard. " God forgive me ! he bent over me to kiss me when he was going out ; I turned my head away as if I had not seen him, and he turned away too—for he was proud—and that was our parting."

She bowed her head, and tears streamed down her cheek. Adèle passed her arm around the waist of Alice, and looked up at her with wistful eyes.

" Ah, but you loved him all the same," she said.

Alice shook her head and shaded her eyes with her hand. She had been married against her will, and she had never forgotten that wrong, she had never loved her husband. It had not been in her power. God alone rules the heart. Youth is severe, because it is ignorant. Adèle blamed her friend, and felt powerless to console her. She did not understand this tardy grief. Silently she withdrew from Alice. Madame Gérard came up to her, whispered something which Adèle did not hear, and finally led Madame Lascours out of the room. The door closed upon them ; Adèle remained alone with the dead man. It was the first time that she found herself

face to face with death. Yet no terror, no nervous dread, no shrinking, did she feel. She was young, but her heart was courageous, strong, and warm. She went up to where he lay; she looked down at his calm, dead face, and she reproved Alice in her heart, and pitied him.

"You were a good old gentleman," she thought; "you were kind to me, and you meant to be my friend. I shall remember you night and morning in my prayers. The peace of God be with your soul, good old man. Ah! if I had been your wife, I would have forgiven you your years for your kindness and your love. Ah! I would have given you many a kiss, for all your white hairs."

Here the door opened, and Madame Gérard appeared on the threshold, and signed her to come out. Adèle obeyed. When they stood in the hall, Madame Gérard said, in a whisper; "Madame Lascours is in her boudoir, and wishes to see you."

Adèle did not reply, but at once entered the room which had heard the sad confessions of Alice. Madame Lascours sat by the table, her cheek on her hand; her tears had ceased, but deadly pallor had overspread her handsome face. Adèle went up to her, and bending over her, she asked how she felt.

"How I feel!" echoed Alice; "ah, child! child! never feel as I feel to-day. Never know sorrow, never know remorse. But that is not what I wish to say," she observed, breaking off. "Jean is waiting for you; it is near midnight, and this is no place for you. Go; you need not wait any longer for your friend to plead your cause; your friend is be-

fore his Judge now, and may the weak woman whom he married, and whose weakness embittered his existence, may she obtain some day as merciful a hearing as will surely be granted to him. But what am I saying?—God help me! I seem to have but one thought. My meaning was this—entreat your cousin, if not for your sake, yet for the sake of the dead, entreat her to delay her departure a few days. Leave the rest to me.”

She pressed her hand to her forehead, like one unable to say more. Adèle did not answer; she stooped, and gently kissing the cheek of her friend, she said—

“Good bye, Alice—God comfort you.”

And she walked out as she had entered, by the glass door that gave on the garden.

“Ah, Mademoiselle! Mademoiselle, how dreadful!” exclaimed Jean, as his young mistress entered the boat. “He was a good old gentleman, though he threatened me once with his cane.”

Adèle did not answer; the boat gliding away on the still dark lake, seemed to bear her to another life. Everywhere around her death seemed to say—“Life is short, life is a dream, life is passing away.”

Vulgar minds are pitiless.

“Madame Lascours will be a rich woman now,” said Jean, resting as they reached the middle of the lake; “and this time she will marry to please herself, and not her mother.”

Adèle remained mute with indignation. The poor old man was not yet in his grave; and already the world, under the shape and voice of Jean, speculated about the future possessor of his wife and inheritance.

“Poor lady!” continued Jean, compassionately, “she cannot have been very happy; he was a good gentleman, but too old; besides, she was fond of another before she married him. I dare say they will marry now,” he added, after a pause. “Ah, well, the world is a rolling wheel, as Mademoiselle Jeannette—Holy Virgin, I have lost her cloak, after all!”

And the incidents of the evening, the death of Monsieur Lascours, and the probable marriage of his widow, were forgotten by Jean in this calamity.

“Poor old man!” thought Adèle, “poor old man! he is not dead an hour, and it is all over.”

She raised her dewy eyes, and looked at the night sky; faint stars burned there, silent and eternal. “Everything is perishable; everything passes away,” she thought. “Ah, Madame Gérard was right—life is short. Let us live well then, let us live well.”

“We are at home,” said Jean.

No longer with a light or springing step Adèle left the boat, and went up the stone steps. In the alley she met Jeannette. Without giving her time to speak, she said—

“Jeannette, where is Cousine?”

“Madame is talking to herself about the going away of the world in the Hall,” sharply replied Jeannette; “and as the world is going away, she does not think it necessary to go to bed. But where is Monsieur Lascours?”

“Ah, Jeannette, it is sad, very sad; Jean will tell you all.”

And leaving Jeannette in the middle of the path, she went on, crossed the court, entered the house, and without giving herself time to think or to pause, she opened the door of the old Hall, where Mademoiselle de Janson sat in her chair, her hands folded, her eyes closed, her lips still murmuring incoherent laments about life and the world. She heard Adèle enter, but she neither moved nor opened her eyes; and it was only when the young girl said, in a low, sad voice, "I should like to speak to you, Cousine," that Mademoiselle de Janson opened her blue eyes with a start. Adèle stood on the hearth before her, no longer the rebellious girl, but pale, grave, and sad. "Cousine," she said again, "I should like to speak to you."

"Speak!" majestically said Mademoiselle de Janson.

"I was very naughty this evening," said Adèle; "I am sorry for it."

"I forgive you," said her godmother.

Adèle pursued.

"You have reared me; I have eaten your bread; slept under your roof; worn the clothes you gave me. I might be a beggar but for you. Forgive me if I was so ungrateful as to forget it."

"I have already forgiven you," said her godmother, with slight impatience; "you are but a child."

Adèle pressed her hands to her heaving bosom with more than childlike passion; and there passed on her young face a more than childlike meaning.

"Even though it should break my heart," she exclaimed, "I will obey you."

"Right—quite right," murmured Mademoiselle de Janson, shutting her eyes again, and not seeming either surprised or elated at this sudden obedience.

"Go to bed, child," she added, "go to bed."

"Cousine, I wish to say something more to you," urged Adèle.

Mademoiselle de Janson looked impatient, but she opened her eyes again.

Pale but firm, Adèle slightly raised her right hand, thus involuntarily and unconsciously commanding attention.

"Cousine," she said, with some solemnity, "I will obey you like a little child so long as you command nothing against my conscience and my honour."

Mademoiselle de Janson's lips parted with amazement, but not a word passed them.

"I do not know what you intend," pursued Adèle, "but do not ask me to marry a man whom I do not like; it is against my honour to sell myself; against my conscience to deceive."

Mademoiselle de Janson shut her eyes, and murmured audibly.

"The little thing is mad; we must put her in a lunatic asylum. She is mad, you know."

Adèle felt very much vexed. Mademoiselle de Janson condescended to open her eyes, and to speak for once like a person in her senses.

"Child," she said, "I pity you; you are labouring under extraordinary delusions. I cannot possibly be angry with you. I do not, indeed, mind explaining my intentions to you; that will perhaps help to dispel the fog that evidently obscures your

intellect. I leave Courcelles because I cannot help it, because matter-of-fact changes in my worldly position compel me to part with it; mine it is no more; it belongs to Monsieur Osborne now; I have sold it, and he has bought it."

Tears rushed to the eyes of Adèle.

"May he enjoy it long," she said.

"Amen!" ironically put in her godmother; "but in the meanwhile we must not stay here—we have no business here."

The heart of Adèle swelled, but she internally granted the justice of this assertion.

"Accordingly," pursued her godmother, "we shall withdraw to a quiet retreat, where we shall lead a quiet life, such as beseems two reduced gentlewomen. What you mean by not asking you to do anything against your conscience, surpasses my poor brains. But your declaration that it is against your honour to marry a man whom you do not like, pains and shocks me. It shows me that marriage has been running in your head all this time."

"Oh, Cousine," cried Adèle, red as fire, "how can you say that? On my word—on my word of honour," she added, with tears of shame and pride, "I do not wish to marry; I do not think of marriage. On my word, Cousine, on my word."

"Well, I suppose I must believe you," said Mademoiselle de Janson, seeming impressed with her earnestness; "Adèle de Courcelles cannot give her word four times to an untruth. I congratulate you on that celibate frame of mind; for marriage is not merely an evil, and the pest of society, but it is posi-

tively out of the question for you ; you are too poor ever to get a husband, though you should long for one."

" But I do not long for a husband, Cousine ; I do not want to marry at all !" cried Adèle, whose face glowed again. " I wish I had bit my tongue before I said a word about it. Oh, *mon Dieu*, why will you not believe me ?"

" I do believe you," gravely said Mademoiselle de Janson ; " and let this discourse end. It is late ; go up to your room—your wardrobe is all packed, of course—and be up early. We leave before day."

The heart of Adèle sank within her. Without a word, she turned away, and left the room. Alas ! it had come back to the beginning, and the rebellious girl, who had protested that unless she were tied hand and foot, she would never leave Courcelles, had yielded.

CHAPTER II.

FAREWELL.

ON the staircase Adèle met Jeannette, who was waiting for her.

The young girl merely said :

“ I am going away to-morrow morning, Jeannette, will you pack up my things ? ”

“ Mademoiselle has consented ? ” said Jeannette, faintly.

“ Yes, Jeannette, I have. ”

She said no more, but ran up the staircase like one who would conquer thought. Jeannette, bewildered at the news Jean had brought, at the death of Monsieur Lascours, and the loss of her cloak, at the suddenness of this leaving and parting, found not a word to say, but followed Adèle upstairs. A little trunk fetched from the lumber-room was more than sufficient to pack all the young girl possessed. With many a groan, Jeannette went through her task ; but at length it was over, and looking round the room, she said :

“ There is nothing more. Will not Mademoiselle go to bed ? ”

Adèle was lying dressed on her bed, with her eyes closed, and her hands folded. She did not raise her head, but replied, in a low, subdued voice :

“It is not worth while, Jeannette. It will soon be day. Kiss me, and go and rest a while.”

Weeping, Jeannette laid her lips on the fair young face of her mistress, and muttering to herself, “God forgive her, I cannot !” she left the room.

Adèle could not sleep. She seemed steeped in grief. To leave Courcelles, and never return to it ; to bid adieu to Jeannette ; to see Mr. Osborne no more,—seemed to her like the division of her soul from her body. And yet it must be. The sad scenes she had witnessed that evening had told her that there is something in life besides the indulgence of youth’s passionate will ; that there is duty, and that duty violated leaves a ceaseless sting behind. They had told her, too, that life is brief, and that it is better to live well than to live happily. As Jean rowed her across the lake her resolve was taken. “I will submit,” she had thought ; “I will obey the woman to whom I owe everything in this world. I will obey her freely without restriction. Poor Alice means well, but she could do nothing. Cousine might have minded her husband, she would not mind her. I will go—Life is short, they say. Oh ! why is it so sweet ? I will see him, my good, kind friend, no more ! and he will forget me ! ‘What ! is she really gone ?’ he will say, when he comes back, and he will kiss his little girl, and think no more about me. God bless him for all his kindness—

even though he should not think of me an hour. Never shall I forget him—never.”

Youth is heroic. It forms noble resolves, and finds a certain joy in great sacrifices. But it is not dispensed from feeling their bitterness. And though Adèle could not repent a decision which conscience had dictated, and which necessity and pride, after what her godmother had told her, confirmed and rendered imperative, still as she lay on her bed, as she felt the time passing, and the coming of the hour that was to sunder her from all she loved, she shook from head to foot, and her very heart felt riven in twain with a passionate sorrow. A faint streak of light shone athwart the sky. She sat up on her bed and looked at it, and for once she did not welcome the dawning day.

“I must bid Lilian farewell,” she thought; “I must give her one kiss before I go.”

She rose and left the room. Lilian and her *bonne* occupied two rooms on the same floor with that of Adèle. Their doors were never locked. Softly the young girl opened that of Mr. Osborne’s child, and entered it. A night-lamp burned on a table, and shed a dim glow in the large apartment. Through the open door of the next room Adèle heard the regular breathing of the *bonne*: she was fast asleep. Lilian, too, was sleeping soundly in her little white bed. On a chair at its foot her clothes lay neatly folded, and on the table where the lamp stood lay in a tray Lilian’s two bijoux, as she called them: the little brooch Adèle had given her; a little locket that held some of Mr. Osborne’s hair.

The courage of Adèle forsook her quite. She sat down on a chair and cried. Then she rose and took up the locket and kissed it with strange passion. Then she put it away where she had found it, and cried again, and saw Lilian's large black eyes looking at her solemnly.

"What are you crying for?" she asked, gravely.

Adèle bent over her and kissed her cheek.

"I am going away, Lilian," she said softly; "you will never see me again. Never—never."

And her tears fell like rain on the child's face.

"But why are you going?" asked Lilian.

"Because I must."

"Stay."

"Stay? Oh! that I could—but I cannot. Happy Lilian! you will stay here for ever with Monsieur Osborne; you will be the little mistress of Courcelles. May you be very happy here, Lilian, as happy as I have been. May every spot of the house, every nook of the garden, be as pleasant to you as they have been to me—and may you never, like me, Lilian, have to bid home and friends good-bye!"

Her voice broke in sobs; but Lilian seemed more surprised than grieved.

"But why do you go?" she asked again.

"Because I must. Oh! Lilian, tell him, tell Monsieur Osborne I mean, that I liked him very much, that I know how kind he has been to me, that I am very sorry to go without bidding him good-bye. Tell him that I know about the ivory-case and the books, and the play, and that I hope God will always bless him, and that he will give back to

his little girl all the kindness he gave to a friendless girl like me. Do you think you can remember that, Lilian?"

"No," frankly said Lilian, "there is too much of it; tell him yourself."

"I shall be gone—gone—when he comes back. I shall never—never see him again, never!" cried Adèle, with passionate lament.

"I wish you would not cry," said Lilian, looking moved; but Adèle, laying her head on the child's pillow, only cried the more bitterly.

"Happy little girl!" she said, "you will be loved and caressed, as I saw you that morning in the garden, and I shall be gone—and who will think of me? The garden will forget me—the orchard will not remember that I have laid down in the grass and sung and slept there; and when old Jeannette is dead or gone, nothing and no one will think of Adèle in Courcelles. Happy little girl! I shall pray for you, and since you cannot remember all I said, remember at least this: tell your father that the little girl, to whom he was so kind, loved him very much."

"I wish you would not go," said Lilian; "pray do not. I like you. Stay."

"I cannot. Good night. Good-bye! Tell him what I told you. Good-bye."

She kissed her again and again, then started up and ran away crying. But she did not enter her room. "I will see my old garden again," she thought; "I will bid my old orchard good-bye."

She lightly glided down the staircase, where the

breaking light of dawning day struggled with the dying glow of the lamp; she softly passed by the door of the old Hall, where she heard Mademoiselle de Janson still talking to herself, and she thought to step out noiselessly into the court; but the door that led to it was locked, and the key was not in the lock. Adèle stood a moment irresolute, then suddenly she remembered Mr. Osborne's rooms that opened on the garden. She went to them at once, and found them open and free. The shutters had not even been closed, and the pale light of a pale sky pervaded them. But all wish of going to the garden forsook Adèle as she looked around her. She remembered his goodness, his kindness, the happy moments she had spent in that house with him. She sat down, and like a child she cried again.

Her heart was very full; her head was heavy with want of sleep; her eyes were swollen with weeping. The sense of fatigue which follows grief in youth came over her. She leaned her cheek upon her hand in a sort of stupor; gradually thought became a dream; visible objects ceased to be distinct; her eyes closed from very weariness, her head sank back, —she slept heavily and soundly.

Very soundly she slept. She did not hear the loud knocking at the outer door, which at once restored all her lost energy to Jeannette, and made her exclaim, as she started to her feet:

“Monsieur is come. Ah! we shall see now.”

In a moment, she had opened the door and admitted her master. He had come, not on the back

of Joli, but in one of the light conveyances of the country. He alighted, dismissed the driver, and entered without a word.

"I thought it was the carriage that is to take away Madame and Mademoiselle," said Jeannette.

No surprise, no annoyance, expressed themselves on Mr. Osborne's face. He looked tired, and no more.

"Tell me when Mademoiselle Adèle is up," he said.

"Mademoiselle has not gone to bed. I think she is in Mademoiselle Lilian's room."

Mr. Osborne threw his cloak on the head of the bannisters, and walked upstairs. The hopes of Jeannette revived faintly.

Mr. Osborne did not find Adèle in Lilian's room. It was silent; the night-lamp burned dimly, and Lilian lay awake in her bed. Her father kissed her fondly.

"What have you been crying about?" he asked, feeling her cheek and her pillow still wet.

"I have not been crying," solemnly replied Lilian; "but the little girl has; do not let her go away."

"Do you like her?" he asked, smiling.

"Much—very much."

He smoothed Lilian's hair, and kissed her again.

"The little girl told me to tell you something, but I have forgotten it."

"She will tell it to me herself," he said, turning away.

"Please," said Lilian, "will you see if my locket

is in the tray. I think the little girl has taken it away."

"Lilian, what could make you think that?" asked her father, displeased; "your locket is there."

"She wanted to take it away," said Lilian, positively; "she kissed it, and she cried, and she would have taken it away if I had not been looking at her."

"You dreamt that, Lilian," said Mr. Osborne, very coolly. He walked downstairs, and found Jeannette standing perturbed at the door of his rooms. She had just detected Adèle asleep there, and still sleeping fast. Stammering, she begged her master not to enter. A look rapidly cast within the room told him what had happened. He smiled, and said "Poor child!" and forbade Jeannette to waken her.

"Close the door," he said, turning away, "and ask Mademoiselle de Janson if I can speak to her."

"Yes, yes," eagerly said Jeannette, "at once, Monsieur, at once."

And, without warning or announcement, she ushered him into the Hall, where Mademoiselle de Janson sat.

With a start, she saw him; with a cold, ungracious face she welcomed him. Her whole manner, as she sank back in her chair, said plainly: "I will not yield." As plainly his look declared, as he sat down, "I am resolved."

CHAPTER III.

WHAT MR. OSBORNE HAD TO SAY.

THERE was a brief silence, during which they gave one another a mistrustful look.

“This is an unexpected pleasure,” at length said Mademoiselle de Janson.

“Are you sure it is unexpected?” he asked, with a smile, in which habitual courtesy tempered natural irony.

But without replying, she drew herself up haughtily, and her whole air implied: “I beg that you will speak.”

“I am fortunate in having arrived in time,” he pursued; “I understand that you were to be gone by this. To say the truth, when I called upon you in Lyons, and found that you had forgotten our appointment, I had a presentiment, that, unless I made some haste, I should scarcely find you here. I have travelled night and day, I may say,” he added, with a provoking smile, which did not seem to put Mademoiselle de Janson in a very good humour, and brought a froward look to her fair face. She moved

restlessly in her chair, and at length she exclaimed, half angrily,—

“And what is it to you what I do with this young girl? What right have you to interfere between her and me?”

His face darkened visibly.

“I have wronged her,” he said.

“Why not say *we* have wronged her?” she haughtily asked. “Your politeness may spare itself the trouble of using the singular.”

“Well, let it be that; we have wronged her—you through imprudence, and I through the folly I committed in trusting my own brother. The wrong you have done her but strengthens my wish to repair my error.”

“You cannot,” she said.

Mr. Osborne bit his lip, and rose and walked about the room. Mademoiselle de Janson followed him with an ironical look, as if she enjoyed his perplexity; yet perplexed he was not in the least; he was simply thinking.

Mademoiselle de Janson had—as we have already said—and as every one who was acquainted with her knew—plenty of peculiarities,—a habit of useless mysteries ranked amongst them. In one of the early chapters of this tale, we have mentioned that on parting from Mr. Osborne on the evening of his arrival, she had addressed to him, with regard to Adèle, a warning of secrecy, which he had not then understood, nor, indeed, much heeded. It was only later, on becoming acquainted with some of the intricacies of his father’s affairs, that the meaning of

Mademoiselle de Janson's warning was revealed to him.

Mademoiselle de Janson and Adèle were richer than the elder lady chose to say, or than the younger one imagined. They were the joint possessors of a fortune, which, without being splendid, was handsome. They had not had it long, and how it had come to them was more than Mr. Osborne ever knew. Mademoiselle de Janson, whose memory was short, had given him three different versions on the subject when they discussed those matters in Lyons. A vast inheritance of West Indian sugar was her first account; shares in the Russian mines.—“What mines?” asked Mr. Osborne.—“Very good mines,” was the mysterious reply—came next; lastly, and thirdly, Mademoiselle de Janson informed him that she had had an uncle, who had died, as such uncles die, and left Adèle and her his entire wealth.

Now, it so happened that nature had not given this inventive lady an uncle, and that Mr. Osborne knew it. The West Indian sugar—the Russian mines—left him sceptical. He could not ascertain the exact truth; but it was very likely that his conjectures touched close upon it. Mademoiselle de Janson had inherited the paternal propensities. She was a gambler at heart. The world might be going away, and no doubt was, but in the meanwhile she flirted with Mammon. Spite the grievous wrong she had sustained at his hands, she kept up a close and active correspondence with the late Mr. Osborne. They speculated together, and against each other, for years, until his death severed this singular alliance.

Had some lucky hit suddenly enriched the two ladies? had slow but sure speculation increased to its present size their originally meagre pittance? Mr. Osborne did not trouble himself with the useless question, which Monsieur Morel alone could have answered satisfactorily; but it troubled him, and sorely, to find that the fate and future of two women, one of whom knew nothing, and was but a child, and the other of whom was fitful, capricious, and all but crazy, lay in his hands. Had it been in his power he would at once have relinquished so unwelcome a responsibility, but it was not; Ixion was tied to his wheel, and had but to go on.

How Robert managed to dispose of the fortune of Adèle and her godmother is a matter which we may allude to, but need not dwell upon. He did it, he half ruined his brother, and with him Mademoiselle de Janson, and Adèle with her. The news filled Mr. Osborne with shame and grief, and a strange fact deepened both feelings: the letter which Adèle had taken and carried had hastened the catastrophe; her own hand, innocent and unconscious, had sealed her own ruin. At once his resolve was taken, and he went to Lyons to impart that resolve to Mademoiselle de Janson, and lay before her the sad and bitter story of his trust abused by his own brother, and of her ruin achieved by the son of her wronger. Mademoiselle de Janson received the news very coolly, said she was not surprised, that the world was going away, begged that Mr. Osborne would oblige her so far as to rid her of Courcelles by purchasing it, and finally deferred hearing any more

until he should return from England, where business compelled him to go at once. They had another interview on his return, but Mademoiselle de Janson felt so hot, and her head ached so badly, that she could not attend to business. She would hear all that Mr. Osborne had to say to her about Adèle on the next day, at a quarter past three. And when Mr. Osborne called upon her the next day at a quarter past three, he learned, without much surprise, that Mademoiselle de Janson was gone. He followed her at once, and, thanks to that reverie which overtook the lady when she ought to have been ordering the horses to be put to the carriage, and the luggage to be securely strapped, Mr. Osborne had arrived before her intended departure could take place.

What had happened since his arrival we know, and how Mademoiselle de Janson's last remark, defying him to repair the wrong of which he was partly the cause, had made Mr. Osborne bite his lip, and rising, pace the room in anxious thought.

Repair it, in the sense of restitution, he could not. The wrong was done, and must stay. He knew it but too well; and without attempting to deny the truth of Mademoiselle de Janson's assertion, he sat down again, and said,—

“May I ask what is to become of the poor child? I understand that you mean to take her away.”

His look, though not his tongue, added, “Where to?” but Mademoiselle de Janson did not choose to reply.

“Yes,” she said, loftily, “I am going away, and

she comes with me, of course. I have not yet made up my mind as to where we are going,—east, west, south, or north. I dare say I shall find it out.”

“My object in asking to speak to you in Lyons,” said Mr. Osborne, “was to propose another plan, so far, at least, as Mademoiselle de Courcelles is concerned.”

“Monsieur Osborne,” said Mademoiselle de Janson, coldly, and speaking in a practical tone, which she could assume when she chose, “I guessed your meaning in Lyons, and I tell you I do not like it. I will not leave my god-daughter and cousin to your care and guardianship. She shall not be the governess and the plaything of your child—the amusement of your idle hours. You cannot give her back her lost fortune. I do not blame you—you know I do not; but to offer Adèle a home here is no better than a piece of unconscious impertinence. Your interference is altogether impertinent, and I resent it. Your own family gives you, or ought to give you, plenty to think of—leave me what remains of mine. Young though she is,” added Mademoiselle de Janson, after a brief pause, “her place is not here as your guest. A man of thirty is not an old man.”

“I hope not,” he said, smiling.

“And a girl of seventeen is not a child.”

“True.”

“And you would not be six months in the house together without falling in love.”

“Excuse me,” said Mr. Osborne, “but you labour under a great misunderstanding. I admire Made-

moiselle Adèle ; I think her original, witty, delightful, but she has everything to learn. She cannot be a governess."

"Then in what capacity you expect my cousin and god-daughter to remain here is more than I can imagine," said Mademoiselle de Janson, with great asperity.

"As my wife, of course," he calmly replied.

She gave a start, and stared at him.

"Impossible!" she cried ; "impossible!"

"And why impossible?" he asked.

"You are too old for her—she is a mere child."

"You have just informed me that a man of thirty is not an old man ; that a girl of seventeen is not a child ; and that we could not be six months in the same house without falling in love."

"I tell you it is impossible," she said again ; "Adèle would not have you."

"We can ask her."

"Are you in love with her?"

"In love," he said, coldly ; "in love, oh, no, Mademoiselle de Janson, I am not in love, nor do I wish to be."

"Then you have no business to marry her."

Mr. Osborne reddened,

"I declare," he said, with some passion, "that if I were in love with that young girl, nothing earthly, neither honour nor duty, no, nothing, should induce me to marry her. For if I loved her, in the sense you attach to that word, I should say her beauty is not what I see it—it is deformity. Her innocence hides a secret canker ; there is gall under the seem-

ing sweetness of that sunny temper. Ah, you forget," he added, more calmly, "that I have married for love, that I have tasted that delightful delusion, that I know the shame of that wakening. Marry again for love! truly, I should be mad!"

"You speak like a man!" indignantly exclaimed Mademoiselle de Janson. "You wrong love, because you know nothing about it."

"And you wrong human nature," he calmly replied, "because, like a woman, you will not see it save under one exclusive aspect. What! shall not the affection, the esteem, of a man of honour—of a good and innocent girl—make as happy a marriage as the blind passion of a madman, and the fond folly of a foolish woman? Do not say so—pray, do not say so."

"So thought your father, I suppose!"

Mr. Osborne sighed.

"Do not let us recall that," he entreated. "You were cruelly wronged; and, believe me, I always felt it; but let the past rest; we are in the present. Give me Adèle," he added, with his most persuasive smile.

"You do not care about her?"

"Indeed I do; I am very fond of her."

He spoke sharply, and seemed hurt with the imputation of indifference.

"Is it possible," he added, with some impatience, "that you do not understand me? No, I do not love her according to your meaning of that word, but I wish to marry her, and to make her as happy as I can. I wish to be happy with her too. No, I might

not have thought of marriage, if Robert had not robbed her. But if I were not fond of her, if I did not feel that I could be fonder of her still, and make her fond of me, I would not add to the wrong she has already suffered a wrong far deeper. I would not give her a cold and careless husband. As for myself," he continued, with some haughtiness, "I would undergo any fate rather than endure the humiliation of marrying a girl whom I did not like. But truly, I need not say what I would not do; if I did not like her, if she did not please me, I could not marry her; my powers of self-subjection would not reach that heroic point."

He spoke with an undisguised scorn that repelled the imputation for ever.

Mademoiselle de Janson gave him an ironical look, and ironically she said—

"So you feel—what will Adèle say?—of course you are confident of success?"

"I? I know nothing about it!"

And personal vanity was so foreign to him, that his denial was as simply uttered as it was worded. It was the truth; he knew nothing about it. Adèle was very fond of him indeed; but would she feel inclined to marry him? He could not tell; he only knew what he wished; her feelings, her desires, he could not guess.

"There never was so conceited a creature as a man," said Mademoiselle de Janson; "you are one of the modest ones, yet you think you have only to speak to get a pretty girl of sixteen, who is of good birth, does not care a rush for money, and has life

before her. Do you think yourself so very fascinating?" she asked.

But Mr. Osborne was not disconcerted by so delicate an enquiry.

"Let Mademoiselle de Courcelles answer the question," he coolly replied.

"The world is going away," murmured Mademoiselle de Janson.

She had time to say no more. The door opened, and Adèle broke in, breathless with joy.

"You come wonderfully *apropos*," ironically observed her godmother; "excuse me," she added, addressing Mr. Osborne, who gave a start, and looked deprecating, "I have a fancy for going to the bottom of this."

"Very well," he said, a little impatiently, "very well;" and rising, he walked away to the window.

"Monsieur Osborne," pursued Mademoiselle de Janson, addressing Adèle, "is, as you know, a widower; he wishes to marry again, and he wishes to marry you—you know my opinion of marriage—but I shall not interfere; if you consent, I do; please yourself."

The arms of Adèle dropped by her side; she turned pale as death. It seemed to her that the world was passing away, and that she was passing away with it. The floor distinctly shook under her, and over her eyes there fell a mist, in which the face of Mr. Osborne, who stood looking at her with grave attention, was floating. But she quickly recovered; and a look at her godmother and at Mr. Osborne,

between whom she stood, told her that she had not been dreaming—that she had imagined nothing.

“Choose,” impatiently said Mademoiselle de Janson.

The heart of Adèle beat very fast. She looked up at Mr. Osborne; he, too, looked at her.

Love had nothing to do, as we know, with his offer; but has man’s heart no strong feeling save love? Are not will and the wish to possess blended with his very being? For a month Mr. Osborne had resolved to marry Adèle if she would have him; and that resolve had not left him indifferent to its accomplishment. With all the force of his will, he now wished to prevail and win the young girl who stood before him with hesitation trembling on her parted lips, with shall I, or shall I not? written in her whole aspect. But her doubt did not last; her eyes sank; she averted his face from her gaze, and turned away. His look fell.

“You refuse!” he said, with some emotion; and he, too, turned away; but in a moment she was by his side, and her hand, lightly laid on his arm, arrested him. He turned round, flushed with pleasure—and why deny it?—with a man’s triumph and pride too; for though she had not spoken, her burning face implied consent.

“After that!” said Mademoiselle de Janson, rising in great indignation, “I shall know what to think of deceitful little things who do not want to marry.”

“Oh, Cousine!” cried Adèle.

“Did you, or did you not, give me your word

four times this evening that you did not wish to marry?" pursued her godmother.

Adèle looked as if only the strongest self-control could prevent her from crying.

"I leave you to your conscience," sternly and loftily resumed Mademoiselle de Janson.

She left the room as she spoke, and Adèle, still bewildered at this strange, rapid scene, remained alone with her future husband. Her heart beat very fast; her head swam; she felt faint, and turned pale. He smiled, and gently took her hand, but she drew it away like one frightened.

"Has this been too sudden?" he quickly asked; "do you repent?"

"No, no!" she cried, with some warmth. "I repent nothing; I am glad, I am happy to stay here for ever with you; but I did not know you were so fond of me."

She looked up in his face with a half-sad wonder that moved his very heart.

"I will make you the happiest little lady there ever has been in Courcelles," he said, very kindly.

"I am—I am—" she exclaimed, in broken, ungrammatical, childish speech; but she hid her face behind her hands;—"I am not crying," she said from behind them, "I am not."

But when he gently moved them, he saw her cheeks covered with tears.

"Well, then, I ought not to be crying," she said, petulantly, "but it is all your fault. Why do you take me when I am full of grief at the thought of going away, and never seeing you, and make me so

happy? Why are you good? why are you fond of me? I will not hear any more. Good-bye to you — good night! and good morning!”

She laughingly withdrew her hands from his, started way, and, with her usual rapidity, she was gone before he could arrest her.

With a smile he heard her running up the staircase. If he had felt a doubt, a fear, they vanished after this. How could happiness fail coming to him with youth, beauty, and innocence; with a temper so delightful, a soul so frank, and a heart so free?

Adèle ran up the staircase with joyous haste. She met Jeannette, who was coming down, and she threw her arms around Jeannette's neck, as Jeannette's young master had once done.

“Wish me joy,” she said, her face radiant with smiles; “I am to be Monsieur Osborne's wife, and to live here for ever with him. Wish me joy, Jeannette.”

And leaving Jeannette more ready to drop with dismay than to wish her little mistress joy, Adèle ran up to her room, and lying down on her bed, she clasped her hands above her head, and smiled with the wondering joy of a child who has read a fairy tale, and finds it true.

CHAPTER IV.

COURTSHIP.

“THAT is absurd, you know, quite absurd.”

Adèle hung her head, and looked passively obstinate.

“I tell you it is absurd,” persisted Mademoiselle de Janson; “marry at your age! Take your doll, child, take your doll, and play.”

Impossible to describe the loftiness, the superciliousness, with which the lady spoke. Yet all Adèle answered was:

“Cousine, why did you consent last night? Your word is passed and so is mine, and we cannot break our word.”

“Indeed! Pray did you keep your word?”

Adèle reddened, but justified herself simply:

“I did not know I should like to marry Monsieur Osborne, until he asked me. I had never thought about it.”

Mademoiselle de Janson turned up her eyes; but as she said no more, Adèle, after standing awhile in the arbour, where this discourse had taken place,

quietly walked away, and pursued the early promenade, which her godmother had interrupted.

She went to the orchard ; she wanted to say her prayers there, to thank God, to be happy and good ; but scarcely had she passed the trellised boundary, scarcely had she sprung through the dewy grass that lay heavy and white in the solitary enclosure, when a doleful voice behind her observed :

“ Mademoiselle is out early this morning.”

It was Jeannette who spoke.

Adèle turned round with some ennui. “ She, too, is going to preach,” she thought, impatiently ; but she was sufficiently confident of her power of resistance not to care much in the main.

“ I have been forty years in the family,” began Jeannette, then suddenly breaking off : “ Oh ! Mademoiselle,” she exclaimed, “ do you know what you are doing ?”

“ Do I know what I am doing ?” echoed Adèle, shortly ; “ much obliged to you, Jeannette, for the question.”

She made a dart to run away, but Jeannette’s outstretched hand caught her skirt and held her back.

“ Mademoiselle ! my dear little mistress,” she said, beseechingly, “ have you thought well about this ? You are going to marry a man double your age, to become the mother of another woman’s child, and yourself but a child.”

“ Thank you !” indignantly said Adèle, and loosening her dress from Jeannette’s relaxed grasp, she coldly walked away.

"I suppose it must be," thought Jeannette, who was something of a predestinarian, and had a hopeless way of looking at things fixed beyond her control.

"They are very tiresome," thought Adèle; "first, Cousine, who bids me say yes or no last night, and who, when I have said yes, wants me to say no this morning; then Jeannette, who waylays me to tell me that Monsieur Osborne is double my age, and has a little girl. I wish he were here."

He stood before her, looking at her attentively; but she did not see him; she walked on until arrested by his figure; she then started back and looked up.

They exchanged no spoken greeting; but he looked down at her kindly, and with child-like pleasure she looked up in his face and smiled.

He took her hand, passed her arm within his, led her a few steps away, made her sit down on an old broken stone bench beneath a tall fruit tree, and sitting down by her side, he said:

"Adèle, I have just left Mademoiselle de Janson. She says that you regret being pledged to me; that you want to be free; is it true?"

"No," bluntly replied Adèle.

"Well, I did not think it was. Mademoiselle de Janson imagines many things, as I know of old; but she has been making some objections to me, which have great weight. She has taxed me with taking an ungenerous advantage of your inexperience. God forbid that I should. It would be sad for us both, if you should repent when it is too late."

"But how could I repent?" she asked, warmly.

“Look at me,” he said, “not so—look me full in the face.”

She obeyed with some wonder. He pushed away the hair from his forehead.

“I am thirty,” he said, “and you are not seventeen.”

“What matter?” she replied; “you are quite a young man.”

“But I shall be old when you still are young.”

Adèle smiled at so much foresight. The argument moved her so little that she did not reply.

“That is not all,” he persisted; “years and experience have given me a certain calmness of manner which you may, when we are married, mistake for coldness of feeling. It would be sad, very sad, indeed, Adèle, if you should fancy that I did not love you enough.”

There was nothing like indifference in his look as he said this.

“Why should I think that?” asked Adèle, simply, “since it is not true.”

“Because, though not true, it might look like it. You know that I have been married—you do not know that my married life, short but wretched, has made me older than I am by twenty years.”

“You were not happy?”

“Happy!” he echoed; “my little Adèle, never say the word in connection with that time.”

“Did you not like her?”

“I! I married her for love.”

“Then what was it?”

Mr. Osborne smiled bitterly.

"She married me for money, or, rather—why wrong her, poor thing?—for a position and a home. She hated me, and could not forgive me being her husband, and I found it hard to forgive her for having deceived me. But why do I bring all this up to you? God forbid that my past should be our future. All I mean to say is this: you are young, and youth is exacting. Do you think that you can take me as I am—a man of thirty, truly fond of you in his heart, but not showing it quite so much, perhaps, as if he were ten years younger?"

Adèle gave him a grave, attentive look, like one who found it hard to understand his meaning.

"Why not?" she said at length, calmly and simply; "am I so foolish or so unreasonable as to fret about the manner, when I have the substance? You like me and you esteem me, or you would not wish to marry me and give me your little girl. What can I wish for more?"

Her look sought his, and rested on his face with a calm serenity that moved him.

"The trust you have in me I repose in you," he said; "I know that if you did not like and esteem me, you would not marry me."

He spoke very quietly, yet the hand of Adèle, which he still held, trembled a little in his; she hung her head and blushed deeply, but one word she did not speak. The orchard was very still; the waving shadows played on the grass, birds twittered in the boughs above them, still Adèle was silent; at length, and with a sudden effort, she broke the bonds of shame, and with maiden freedom she looked up bravely in his face.

“Do not laugh at me,” she began, deprecatingly; “but you see I was a child the other day, and I am not yet accustomed to think myself a girl and a woman. You startled me by saying that I was going to marry you. I had just said it myself, but it did not seem the same thing. Oh, yes, I like you,” she added, with a sudden, vehement warmth, that showed how full her heart was, “let Cousine bid me play with my doll, let Jeannette moan and shake her head, I will like you. You have been to me like the blessed sun of the good God, warm, genial, delightful. Before you came I wanted something; I did not know what it was, but I wanted it. Many a day have I sat and sung here, and sighed spite my singing. I was not sad, I was not unhappy, but I felt solitary and chill, as if I had lived too long in the shade, as if the sun that warmed others would never shine on me. You came, and I felt a great change. You came, all goodness, all kindness, and I felt that I wanted nothing more; that I, too, had my summer and my sun; and now, after asking me to live for ever with you, you say you know I like and esteem you. If you know but that, you know little; if you do not know that I love you much, very much, more than any one else; that I admire and respect you entirely, that I think myself happy and honoured to be your wife and the mother of your little girl; if you do not know that, what do you know?”

Rapid and ardent fell these words from the lips of the imprudent girl. More honest than wise, she spoke out her whole heart, and did not seem to feel or divine

that much which is true may be withheld from a lover's ear. But was Mr. Osborne a lover? He heard her with emotion, indeed, but with an emotion which he mastered without effort. He was pleased that Adèle should be so fond of him, yet no strong passion blinded him to the nature of that fondness. It was the enthusiastic affection of a girl, it was grateful worship more than love, but it was sweet for all that. Kindly and earnestly he looked at her, but he had no time to reply; Lilian came bounding towards them with a joyous laugh, that rang in the old orchard like pleasant music. She was fond of Adèle in her capricious way, and to her, without much regard to propriety, she now went first.

"You did not go away," she cried, clapping her hands joyously, "you did not go away."

"Mademoiselle Adèle is not going away," said Mr. Osborne, quietly; "she is going to marry me and to stay here with us both. How do you like that?"

Lilian was not fond enough of her papa to be jealous. She was sitting on the knee of Adèle, and she looked up in her grave, blushing face with an inquiring, surprised gaze, then she laughed carelessly, shook her curls, said she liked it very well, and began to examine curiously the pattern of her future stepmother's sleeve. Mr. Osborne was too just to be offended with a child, but he was sensitive enough to feel even the light sting of a child's indifference.

"Who loves me like that little girl?" he thought, and his look rested on Adèle so kindly, that she turned her face away, and rising, took Lilian's hand;

but he, too, rose, and walked with them. Mr. Osborne felt in a happy mood. He had reached that state of moral repose which the fulfilment of a resolve gives to honourable and conscientious men. It had cost him much, more than might have seemed right or just, to decide on marrying Adèle, but that silent struggle was over, and it now bore its fruits and its rewards in the calm pleasure with which he lingered by the young girl's side on that serene autumn morning. He looked at his future wife, who was laughing and playing as simply as ever with his child; he saw her beauty, he remembered her innocence, he knew her native goodness, and he felt that if ever duty had come under a sweet aspect to him it was then. The dawn of happy days, free from passion and its torments, but blest by love and its joys, seemed to break before him, pure, tender, and mild, like the happy summer time.

"I do believe you are the best of little girls," he suddenly said, laying his hand on her shoulder, and looking down at her with tender admiration. Lilian was hunting a butterfly a few steps off; Adèle looked up at Mr. Osborne. "Oh, you are as good as you are handsome," she thought, with a beating heart; "may God make me but good enough for you," she added, after an internal pause. And thus they walked through the orchard and garden on that pleasant sunny morning, the child playing before and around them, his hand resting on her shoulder, his thought dwelling on her, her thought reverting to him; he thinking her the best of her kind; she worshipping him as best of all; neither what is

called in love with the other, yet both very happy in each other.

Thus passed the morning, and thus too the day. Jeannette had kept aloof, and Mademoiselle de Janson had remained invisible : entire freedom was their lot. It had been a happy day ; yet Adèle was not sorry to be once more alone in her own room, to sit down there and think awhile. She could not understand how Mr. Osborne could be so good and so kind, as to marry a poor, ignorant, little thing like Adèle de Courcelles. There was something incredible in it ; it was true, indeed, a fact ; but it was very marvellous, and to be pondered over. She had not time to think on it long. Jeannette was knocking at her door.

“ I will not let you in,” cried Adèle, a little annoyed at being so soon disturbed ; “ no, I will not.”

“ It is Monsieur, who wishes to speak to Mademoiselle,” said Jeannette, deprecatingly ; “ but if Mademoiselle is in bed——”

“ No—no,” interrupted Adèle, opening the door at once, “ here I am : where is he ?”

He was standing on the square landing behind Jeannette, who held a low, brass lamp : he came forward and excused himself for having disturbed her.

“ But it could not be helped,” he added ; “ Mademoiselle de Janson is evidently not of sane mind. She has just withdrawn the consent she freely gave yesterday ; and as you are unfortunately not of age, and it would be rather long to wait for your twenty-first year, I have, to my great regret, been obliged

to tell her, that rather than be thus trifled with, I would certainly take legal steps to free you from her control. I suppose you know the meaning of the French word of emancipation, as applied to such cases."

"I have heard of something like that," replied Adèle, very much startled; "but, pray do not do it; pray do not."

"Indeed I should, and I would," he said, rather emphatically; "for, apart from personal motives, I would not let you remain under the control of so eccentric a lady; but do not look so frightened, there will be no need to resort to such extreme measures; your cousin has veered back again only——" here Mr. Osborne broke off rather abruptly, and taking the lamp from Jeannette's hand, he plainly told her to wait for him downstairs.

"I need not wait for Monsieur at all, unless Monsieur wants me," stiffly replied the old woman, anything but pleased with the intimation.

"Yes, I do want you," he said, quietly.

Jeannette went down grumbling. Her heart had swelled with indignation on hearing how this insolent foreigner had threatened Mademoiselle de Janson with the law because she would not let him have her little goddaughter as quietly as he wished. He interfere between them, indeed! Well, things were come to a pretty pass. Why should he marry Mademoiselle Adèle, she, Jeannette, should like to know. Angrily she brooded over those thoughts, and waited at the bottom of the staircase for Mr. Osborne's descent; but Mr. Osborne seemed to have a great

many things to say to his betrothed, if one might judge by the length of time he stayed upstairs. At length Jeannette could not bear this any longer; grumbling to herself that he might take it as he pleased, she went up: the landing was vacant and dark, save where a gleam of light stole out of the young girl's room. Jeannette entered it without knocking. Adèle was sitting on a chair with her face in her hands; she looked up abruptly; her eyes were glittering and bright; her cheeks burned like fire.

"Is Monsieur gone?" asked Jeannette.

"Yes—go away—he does not want you."

"Mademoiselle! something has happened."

"Nothing; go away. He is going away to-morrow morning; he will not come back till Tuesday week. Jeannette, I have a white dress, have I not?"

"Mademoiselle," cried Jeannette, in great alarm, "what do you want a white dress for? You are not going——"

"Yes, I am," interrupted Adèle, wilfully; "he has asked me to marry him next Tuesday week, and I have said yes. Cousine cannot afford to waste more than ten days on her cousin and god-daughter, it seems. She wants to get rid of me, and he wants to have me—let them both have their way."

Jeannette sat down on the floor, and groaned aloud.

"My poor lamb! my poor darling!" she began, "you are sold to the butcher. She has sold you, and he has bought you."

She shut her eyes, rocked herself to and fro, and groaned again. Adèle stamped her tiny foot, clasped her hands, and looked tragically inclined: it was too much to hear Mr. Osborne likened to a butcher; but precisely because it was too much, she bore it better than if it had been less.

"Jeannette," she said, a little loftily, "get up, and go to bed, and sleep; it is plain that you need it. Yet I beg to say, once for all, that I am no lamb to be bought or sold; nor am I tame—not at all, Jeannette. I am a De Courcelles,—that is to say, rather wild and wilful—an animal, if you like—oh, you need not turn up your eyes! a lamb is an animal, surely!—but one, at least, that has and owns no master. She sell—he buy—me—you insult me;—you insult him. I give myself, of my own free will, to a beloved master, and he takes with joy the thing he would scorn to buy. It is to be in ten days; I should not care a pin if it were to-morrow. All I feel, and that I do feel keenly"—her eyes became dim, and her voice shook—"is, that I am thrust on him with indelicate, ungenerous haste; but he, in his goodness, does not seem to perceive that; all he sees and feels is, that he cannot take me too soon from her unkindness to his own kind keeping. Be it so, I say. And now go and sleep. He does not want you; he went down the other staircase, and forgot all about you. Good night!"

And Jeannette, who had risen whilst her young mistress spoke, was half-led and half-pushed out of the room, of which the door was at once closed and bolted on her.

“At length,” thought Adèle, sinking back on her chair, “at length I shall be really alone. I shall be able to think.”

Think! she could not think. Thought escaped from her troubled brain like water from the sieve of the Danaïdæ. All she felt and knew was, that she was going to marry Mr. Osborne; that he was leaving to-morrow, and coming back in ten days, and that they were to be wedded next Tuesday week. Her heart beat, her breath seemed gone at the thought. Her head ached, too. She threw herself on her bed, and there, she knew not how, she sank into a torpid dream, and slept. When she awoke, another day had wakened too; bright streaks divided the grey sky. Adèle sat up startled.

“Did I say my prayers last night?” she thought. She had not said them; she had forgotten them in the morning, because she was happy with Mr. Osborne in the orchard; she had forgotten them in the evening, because she was troubled with her hurried marriage. “I forgot Him in my joy; I did not go to Him in my trouble; I did not consult Him in my perplexity,” she thought; “God will not bless that day.”

Other thoughts also came to her; but they frightened her; she would not heed them; she jumped up; she opened the window; a small open carriage was driving away along the road; Mr. Osborne was in it. He saw her; took off his hat, and kissed his hand; and Adèle drew back, half-pleased, half-frightened.

: Nine heavy, tedious days had rolled by.

“Oh, Cousine, Cousine, you will break my heart!” cried Adèle.

Passionately she threw down her work, and vehemently rising, she clasped her hands, and walked up and down the old Hall with quick, agitated steps. The light of the lamp fell on her face—it was flushed, but sadly worn.

Mademoiselle de Janson leaned back in her chair, and gave her god-daughter a supercilious and ironical look.

Mr. Osborne had been gone nine days. The Monday evening was closing; but he had written twice, and the Tuesday morning was still fixed for the marriage. These nine days had been spent by Mademoiselle de Janson in teasing her god-daughter. She probed her through and through with taunts, with ironical congratulations, with little sneers, with lofty scorns, until Adèle felt as if a hundred wasps were stinging her daily. She had never experienced anything like it before. Mademoiselle de Janson had ever treated her with coldness, neglect, and deep indifference; she had never taken the trouble of tormenting her. Adèle had grown up unheeded, unloved, uncared for, it is true, but no domestic discipline had tamed her temper, and broken in her proud young spirit; she was still, as she had said herself to Jeannette, a creature wild, wilful, and free.

Intolerable, irritating beyond measure, therefore, was this change to her. She listened until she longed to fly, like a thing pursued, beyond the hunter's reach; she endured until unable to bear more, she

broke out into passionate exclamations, half-indignant, half-imploring, but which only roused the disdainful wrath of her godmother.

“Pooh! pooh!” now said Mademoiselle de Janson, “what nonsense are you talking?—Break your heart!”

“You do! you do!” cried Adèle, vehemently; “you say I do not like him—that I marry him for his money. I do not care about his money—I do not. I love him; that is all.”

“You do not!” deliberately said her godmother; “I repeat it; you do not love him. Never say in after-times that you had not fair warning.”

She spoke with emphatic solemnity.

Adèle, who was still walking up and down, stopped short, and looked at Mademoiselle de Janson. She turned red and pale; then suddenly she went up to her godmother, and kneeling down on the floor by her, she looked up in her face, and said, softly—

“Why are you so unkind to me, Cousine? I do like him, indeed I do. You liked the father, why should I not like the son? He is good; he is kind. Why do you say I do not love him? pray tell me.”

Beseeching was her look; imploring were her tones; but whenever it came to this pass between them, whenever some word of warning gravely uttered had rendered Adèle submissive, willing to be lectured, and to take good counsel, Mademoiselle de Janson capriciously returned to the ironical mood, and repelled the young girl with some sharp sarcasm.

“Get up,” she now said, impatiently; “all this

is a comedy ; you are a deceitful little thing, and I hate comedy."

Adèle started to her feet, red as fire.

"I am not deceitful!" she cried, indignantly. "I did not know how much I liked him until he asked me to marry him ; but I know it now, and I love him with my whole soul—with my whole heart."

"I congratulate you!" ironically said Mademoiselle de Janson, rising.

Adèle felt that her godmother was not addressing her. She turned round quickly, and saw Mr. Osborne standing behind her. He had that moment arrived, and, unheard by her, he had entered the room even whilst she spoke.

"Pity to interfere with so tender a meeting," said Mademoiselle de Janson, sailing out of the apartment. Adèle remained standing in the centre of the Hall ; for awhile she stood there calm and still ; then shame, pain, mortification, were too much for her ; she burst into tears. But Mr. Osborne would not let her grieve. Adèle scarcely knew how, but somehow or other, she found herself sitting in her godmother's chair, and he was standing by her side, smiling kindly, and softly wiping her wet eyes with his hand. Evidently, unless she wanted him to go on with the tender task, she must cease weeping. She did so at once, and at once he sat down by her, and asked what ailed her. Her heart was too full for her not to tell him ; besides, he was her only friend : out it came, crude and unmitigated—

"All this week Cousine has been saying it is not you I like, but your house and your money. There!

what do you think of that?" she added, very scornfully.

Mr. Osborne reddened, not at what he heard, but at what he feared. He laughed, but not very sincerely; and he said, with a carelessness which did not prevent his look from seeking hers steadily—

"I think nothing of it so long as she does not say that I do not like you."

"Oh, but she could not say that," replied Adèle, smiling securely. He breathed relieved; Mademoiselle de Janson had not broken the solemn promise he had exacted, and she had given, that Adèle should never know how and why he had first thought of marrying her. So far, so good. He now set himself to consoling her, and he soon succeeded.

"You are thin and altered," he said, with kind concern; "but once we are married, no one shall have the power to tease or torment you. In every sense I will care for you. But will you be docile?" he asked, dubiously.

It was very pleasant to hear a voice of such kind and friendly solicitude. Adèle promised unlimited obedience.

"Then you must stay more within doors," he said; "you must not go out on cold, dewy mornings; you must not sit in the grass, or run bareheaded in the garden when a keen north wind is blowing; all of which you have been doing whilst I was away."

"So Jeannette has told you; she said she would; but it did not hurt me; I only caught a cold, which is gone now. I would have run any distance, any

where, and in any weather, not to hear Cousine telling me—‘ You know you do not like him.’ ”

He smiled at the indignant vehemence with which she spoke—at the angry tears which glittered in her eyes.

“ Why did you mind her ? ” he asked ; “ she did not know what she was saying. Pity her ; she has suffered much. Yet I am half-angry with her ; I see she has worn and tried you sorely. Well, it will be over to-morrow. All is settled as I wrote to you. I have made interest with the Préfet. The civil marriage is dispensed with for the present. The religious ceremony can take place to-morrow morning as early as we like ; and when it is over, we shall go to Lyons, and there be married again according to French and English law. Mademoiselle de Janson will not be satisfied unless these three marriages take place, and she must be obeyed. You will have rather a dull wedding-day, I fear, Adèle ; no gay party of guests and friends ; no pretty bridesmaids in white ; nothing of what girls look forward to and like to remember.”

“ I do not care,” she interrupted, quickly.

“ But you will find,” he continued, “ that spite these important omissions, we shall be none the less truly married to-morrow morning. Ay, indeed, my little Adèle, to-morrow a new life begins for you ; to-morrow Courcelles is yours to govern and to rule, from the garret to the kitchen ; to-morrow Lilian Osborne is yours to rear and make a good girl of ; and finally,” he added, smiling at the earnestness with

which she listened, "to-morrow William Osborne is yours to torment or to bless at your pleasure."

"You are laughing at me," said Adèle, shaking her head sagaciously; "yet I like to hear you speak so. There is ever kindness in your irony. God made you good, and though you should try ever so much, you cannot unmake His doing."

There was a truer appreciation of his real character in these words than Mr. Osborne would have given Adèle credit for. He looked at her attentively, and he felt as he looked, that the child was passing away, that the woman was coming. He smiled no more; tender and grave, though brief, was the rest of their discourse; they spoke of the morrow, but incidentally, like two friends who are going to take a journey together, and who know they can take it in mutual trust for mutual happiness.

When they parted, Adèle asked herself wonderingly, what had ailed her the last week? how and why the sarcasms and reproaches of her godmother had affected her so very strangely?

As snow melts in the sun, as night clouds pass away in the morning, so with the kind look of his eye, and the friendly touch of his hand, all doubt, all mistrust, all fear had passed away from her heart.

CHAPTER V.

THE WEDDING-DAY.

WHAT did she dream of that night?—She never knew, but it was something sad and strange, for she awoke with a stifled sob, on which followed the joyous consciousness that she had been dreaming. But scarcely had she opened her eyes when she closed them again, dazzled by the vivid light that met them. Was day so far gone? She looked again. It was not the clear, bright light of day that filled her room. It was the light of a candle burning pale and faint on her table, and reflected in the little mirror above it, and that light shone on the troubled face of Jeannette, who stood at the foot of the bed looking at her with sad earnestness.

“What has happened?” cried Adèle, leaning up on one elbow—but before Jeannette could reply, the young girl sank back; nothing had happened, but she was to be married that morning. She could scarcely believe it. To agree to become Mr. Osborne’s wife seemed one thing, and to be actually married to him seemed another.

“Mademoiselle must get up,” said Jeannette, with a sigh.

Adèle rose silently. Sorely perplexed had Jeannette been for the whole of that week. She could not discover whether she was pleased or sorry with the approaching marriage of her little mistress. That Mademoiselle Adèle should become the real mistress of Courcelles was great pride, but why was there that Monsieur Osborne?—Why should he step in and become the proprietor of Mademoiselle Adèle?—Jeannette did not like her master. She had nothing to say against him; he paid well, he did not grumble, he was not hard; but Jeannette did not like him—he was too pale. “I do not like such white women and men,” she thought; “there is no blood in their cheek, there is no life in their heart.” But the trifling objection of Mr. Osborne’s complexion was counterbalanced by so many advantages, personal and adventitious, that Jeannette could not have said whether she liked him to marry Adèle or not; and fortunately for her peace of mind, the matter had been decided by those whom it concerned most, without reference to her opinion, and Jeannette had nothing to do with it but to dress her mistress. She went through her task with silent diligence. When it was nearly over, Adèle sat down, and leaning her cheek upon her hand, she said gravely,—

“I hope I shall make a good wife to Monsieur Osborne, Jeannette.”

“I hope Monsieur will make a good husband to Mademoiselle,” said Jeannette, jealously.

"Oh, there is no fear of that," was the prompt reply; "he is so good, so perfect."

"Mademoiselle will spoil him if she begins by adoring him so," observed Jeannette, with a frown; "husbands are conceited enough by nature."

Adèle looked as if she were listening to a blasphemy, and asked how Jeannette could say such dreadful things.

"I do not say there are no conceited men," she observed; "but he—oh, Jeannette! I hope I shall make a real Alcestis."

"And is not Mademoiselle sure?"

Adèle looked doubtful.

"I am so fickle," she began; "I thought it so delightful to be married last night, and I think it so strange this morning. Yes, I am fickle, and I am not sure that I am not deceitful too. But I hope that I shall make Monsieur Osborne a good wife. Oh, I hope he will never be sorry for having married me!"

"Sorry for having married a young and pretty girl like Mademoiselle de Courcelles," indignantly began Jeannette, who thought so much humility misplaced; a knock at the door interrupted her.

It was Mademoiselle de Janson, who sharply asked if they ever meant to be ready.

"I am ready, Cousine," said Adèle, hurriedly, fastening on her veil and orange wreath—"I am ready."

And she would have left the room without giving herself one look, if Jeannette had not resolutely detained her.

“Mademoiselle must look at herself,” she said.

Adèle obeyed. The light of a dull day was breaking in her room, but she had a blooming cheek that could even brave that gloomy morning. Her white robes, her long thin veil and orange wreath, became her well. It was the first time in her life that Adèle saw herself adorned. She looked at herself, laughed at her own beauty, and turned away her blushing face, whilst Jeannette took her hands and kissed them.

“God bless my dear little mistress!” she said, with much emotion; “and may she be as much loved as was the wife of my young master; but may she be happier—happier, by far, than was that poor little lady!”

“And Monsieur Osborne—do you wish Monsieur Osborne nothing?” asked Adèle, softly.

“And what more can I wish him than what he is taking?” asked Jeannette; “a pretty young lady whom he is fond of.”

“As if he cared about my face!” impatiently exclaimed Adèle; “as if he were not too good and too wise to think about this.”

“King Solomon—” began Jeannette.

Adèle turned crimson.

“You are not going to compare Monsieur Osborne to King Solomon?” she asked, gravely.

“Oh, no,” pacifically replied Jeannette; “besides, it is time for Mademoiselle to be going.”

“I had forgotten all about it,” said Adèle; “will you not make yourself smart, Jeannette?”

“I am not going with Mademoiselle; I have an

idea of my own : age is unlucky at weddings. I shall not go."

Jeannette's ideas were ever fixed stars. Adèle did not insist. She left her room without further delay. Yet in passing before Lilian's door, she suddenly paused. She remembered how she had entered that room ten days before, and yielding to a sudden impulse, she entered it again. Lilian was fast asleep ; her flushed cheek was resting on her white pillow. Adèle bent over her, and kissed her softly. " I shall be very fond of you," she thought, " and very good to you, Lilian, and never like the wicked stepmothers in the Fairy Tales." She embraced her again, and left without having wakened her.'

At the foot of the staircase, Adèle found Jean, to whom she graciously gave her hand to kiss, and Mademoiselle de Janson, who looked on austereiy. Mademoiselle de Janson also looked like one who is going to witness a hanging, and who takes no pleasure in the execution. Odious and distasteful to her was this affair, as she called it, and sharp and short had she been with Adèle since it had been decided. She was now, on her god-daughter's wedding morn, anything but sweet, and receiving her with an abrupt remark of—

" Oh ! you have managed to get ready, have you ?"—she at once led her away through the garden.

A boat with two rowers was to take them across the lake to the little church, where they were to find Mr. Osborne. It was waiting at the foot of the steps. As Adèle entered it, she hesitated. She gave the gray garden a strange look, and clasped her hands

to her beating heart. She put her foot forward and drew it back. She was bidding happy, girlish, maiden life a long adieu, and she felt it.

"Never more," a voice seemed to murmur behind her, "never more!"

"Well," austere said Mademoiselle de Janson.

At once Adèle entered, and was by her side, and at once the boat shot away.

"It will snow to-day," said Jeannette to Jean, whom, sorely against his will, she had kept within. "I wish the sun would shine, and I do think that people ought to marry in summer time."

"It is impossible," thought Adèle, in the boat; "until I see him, I shall not believe it." That proof was not denied her long. The boat stopped, she looked up, and Mr. Osborne stood on the bank ready to help Mademoiselle de Janson to land. She haughtily declined his aid. With a smile he let her step alone on shore, and turned to Adèle.

"Good morning," he said, as she took his proffered hand.

They exchanged one rapid look. He thought he had never seen her look half so pretty, and Adèle thought she had never seen him look half so serenely happy as on that morning. Calm content was in his whole aspect, and expressed his real state of mind. For the last week he had looked steadily at the bright side of his marriage with Adèle, and it had seemed to him pregnant with blessings. She was young, good and pretty. She had few faults, and her sunny temper and ardent heart effaced them. There was in her nature a strain of careless heroism

and unconscious greatness, which nothing as yet had called forth, but which promised, he thought, a noble woman and a good wife. She was very fond of him, and he felt he could love her dearly. He loved her ingenuousness; he loved her youth, and good and wise as Adèle thought him, he loved her beauty. With marked attention he now looked at her from head to foot, then he smiled.

“Is there anything amiss?” she asked, with some emotion.

“Amiss! No, indeed. You are always pretty, of course; but you look lovely this morning.”

It was the first time that he openly admired her. Adèle gave him an astonished look, not free from dismay, and there is no knowing what she might have said if her godmother had not interfered.

“You will have time enough to talk afterwards,” she sharply said.

They walked on. Before them stood a low, damp church, to which Adèle parochially belonged. Grass-grown was the path that led to it, half-ruined the little belfry that rose above the porch.

“We shall repair it, shall we not?” asked Mr. Osborne of his young bride. “It must have a new bell in memory of to-day.”

Adèle did not answer. She felt giddy, and seemed to tread on air. “I shall not believe it until I stand at the altar with him,” she thought.

Her foot slipped as she went up the steps to the door; if he had not caught hold of her she would have fallen. He felt her trembling against his arm.

"Are you afraid?" he asked, in a whisper.

"Yes," she replied, in the same tone; "and you?" she added, looking up at him.

"Not at all," he answered, with a secure smile. "Take courage. In a few minutes all will be over."

"Oh, no," thought Adele, desperately; "in a few minutes all will begin: the marriage, the new life, the husband. If I could but run away!"

Run away, indeed! They were in the church. It was ancient, and built in the heavy Byzantine style; massive were its pillars, gloomy were its low arches; its windows of stained glass had escaped the revolutionary fury. Gold, purple and azure tints fell on the cold flags, where half-effaced inscriptions still recorded how there, for many a century, the De Courcelles had been baptised, wedded, and buried. A crimson cloth and a white lace adorned the altar, bare unless on festive days; wax lights burned upon it, and an old priest was reading in a low tone the impressive epistle which the church has selected for the marriage service.

Before that altar, scarcely knowing how she had got there, Adèle stood by Mr. Osborne's side. She opened a white-bound prayer book, his gift, and she read the solemn admonitions of Saint Paul: "Wives obey your husbands, even as the Lord . . ." "Husbands love your wives as Christ loved his Church." With an agitated hand, she closed the book and looked up at him. Composure and serenity reigned in his aspect; no doubt, no fear, had found their way there. He answered her look with a smile, that said:

“What ails you? It is nothing—it will soon be over.”

“We are the children of the Lord,” murmured the priest; “we cannot wed as Pagans wed.” Then he opened the Gospel; solemn fell from his lips the solemn words of the Redeemer: “Man shall leave his father and his mother, and cleave to his wife, and they shall be one flesh: let man not divide what God has joined.”

And now the moment was come, and they were to be married. The old priest stepped down from the altar and the railings, and looked at them, and half smiled. He was a stranger to the place, he knew nothing of them; but they were young, beauty adorned them both, and goodness, virtue, and love seemed to him written in their two faces. He could not but smile, he could not but wish them well.

It was soon over; her hand was in his; they were questioned, and they replied; his ring was on her finger; she was his wife. All the blessings of marriage had been called down upon them both, and upon her especially. “May she follow the example of the holy women,” said the priest; “may she be loved by her husband as Rachel was; wise like Rebecca; faithful like Sarah.”

Adèle did not heed or hear him. She was kneeling on the cold flag; her burning forehead, her clasped hands, rested on the iron railing. She saw, she heard, she felt, she knew nothing, save that she was married. A gentle touch on her arm at length roused her; the priest was walking away; an old sacristan was extinguishing the wax lights, and strip-

ping the altar. The church was dark once more. All was over. Adèle rose, and mechanically took Mr. Osborne's arm. They walked out of the church ; as they issued from the door and stood at the head of the steps, Mademoiselle de Janson looked sternly at the new-married pair, and coldly said,—

“ You have had your way, both of you—I wish you joy. I should say that this marriage has been rather precipitate, were it not plain enough that the courtship has been going on a long time.”

“ You wrong me,” said Mr. Osborne, reddening ; “ and my word, which I have passed to you, ought to acquit me.”

“ What !” exclaimed Mademoiselle de Janson, with feigned surprise, “ what, you expect me to believe that a girl of sixteen, reared in modesty and reserve by me, would, without some previous agreement between you and her, have thus accepted you as soon as you offered yourself. No, Monsieur Osborne, I cannot believe that ; Adèle likes you, of course ; but I will never believe,” emphatically added the lady, “ that she had conceived a secret affection for a man who neither thought of nor sought her.”

“ For Heaven's sake, do not mind her !” said Mr. Osborne, turning to Adèle, who had hidden her burning face in her hands.

“ However that may be,” pitilessly continued Mademoiselle de Janson, who had kept this cutting sarcasm for a parting gift to her god-daughter, “ I have now done with her and with you ; but I give you fair warning, Monsieur Osborne ; in her you have got an ungrateful, disobedient little traitor.”

So saying, Mademoiselle de Janson turned away, with a lofty wave of her hand, and entered a travelling carriage which was waiting for her at the church gate. It slowly drove up a steep road ; Adèle looked after it, mute and tearless, but with a strange expression of woe on her young face.

“ A traitor !” she murmured, “ a traitor !”

Mr. Osborne passed his arm around her, and drew her to his side.

“ She is gone,” he said, “ let her go. She never loved you, or she had not parted from you with such mad, unkind words. Let her go. If you have but one friend remaining, remember that he will ever be the truest and the best.”

“ I will not cry on my wedding-day, I will not !” exclaimed Adèle, with some warmth.

She shook her head, as if to banish thought, lightly descended the church-steps, and in a sort of hurry she entered the boat. Mr. Osborne followed her in, and vainly looked for some shawl or cloak in which to wrap her from the keen morning air. He chid her for her neglect ; but she smiled at his fears. She was warm, quite warm, she said ; and indeed, her cheek looked not merely flushed, but burning.

The boatmen had scarcely rowed them away a few steps, when Jeannette’s prediction was fulfilled. The greyness of the sky melted into snow ; the awning partly protected Adèle ; but still Mr. Osborne was uneasy. He urged the boatmen to make haste ; spite her laughing resistance, he wrapped his wife in a coarse blanket which he found behind one of

the cushions. Better spoil a wedding-dress than take cold.

At length the lake was crossed ; the grey front of Courcelles rose before them ; they skirted that ancient garden whence Adèle had so often looked down as a dreaming girl, and to which she returned a wedded woman. The boat stopped ; without waiting for his aid, she started up ; it was snowing fast ; she sprang up the stone steps and darted down the first path she found. Her nimble feet seemed to have got Mercury's wings ; her veil floated behind her through the falling snow. In vain Mr. Osborne called her back ; she did not hear ; she neither answered nor looked round. She ran so quickly, too, that he could scarcely overtake her. At length he stood by her side, and his hand, lightly laid on her shoulder, arrested the fugitive. He stooped and looked in her face with a surprised smile.

“ Look where you have brought us,” he said.

They stood underneath the old lime-tree, the pride of Courcelles, but half-a-mile from the Manor. She turned round, and gave him a startled look. Was this Adèle ? Her eyes shone like diamonds ; her cheeks were flushed like roses ; her red lips were parted : her whole aspect had a dazzling brightness that made Mr. Osborne look at her like one bewitched.

“ Yes,” said Adèle, smiling, “ I am all covered with snow.”

She shook her head ; in a shower the light flakes fell from her veil and her orange wreath, but not from her dark hair ; there they lay, like wintry blos-

soms ; one, half melted, shone and sparkled in a cluster of dewdrops clear and glittering. Still he looked at her ; amazed at her, confounded at himself.

“ Oh, no, you will never believe that, will you ? ” she cried, with sudden warmth ; “ never ! you know that I will love and obey you truly ; and that I will die before I deceive you.”

She turned her flushed face towards him. A little spark may kindle a great flame. Was he touched with the appeal ? Did the beauty he had so often beheld unmoved affect him then ? Did the consciousness that she was his, penetrate a heart to which possession was sweeter than hope ? We doubt it. We rather think that he had always liked her better than he knew : but all we have to tell is this—his left hand still rested on her shoulder ; in his right he took and clasped both hers ; her face still looked up to his ; he bent his near it ; for the first time, he kissed her ; and from that hour he loved her.

Faster fell the snow ; it whitened the paths and the dark hedges ; it clung to the trunks of trees and to the stems of branches, like a soft white moss ; it gave a lonely statue in its shallow harbour a chill, shroud-like garment, but it drifted past, and it did not touch the two beneath the lime-tree. Mr. Osborne leaned against its aged trunk ; his left arm was still passed around his young wife, and held her bound to his side ; his right hand still clasped both her own ; his look was bent on her flushed and half-averted face with smiling pride. He smiled because of its beauty, and he was proud because that beauty

called him master. But he did not speak, for what can happy love find to say on a marriage morn? He could not fear—she was his; he could not plead—she was won. He could only fill the present with a lover's fondness, and the future with a husband's hopes; he could only love, and gaze with calm delight on what he loved.

Ah, Love! thou art not always the child of doubt or desire; thou canst be born under cloudless skies, and nursed in the very lap of security. Thy fears and thy torments, the bliss of passionate young hearts, would be the curse of lives whose current already flows pure and still in its strength. Then it is well that thou shouldst come to some as thou camest to him on that day, without warning to caution past sorrows, without pain to trouble a weary heart, without dark hour of trial or suspense to humble a man's pride, with nothing but promises and blessings of which he could in his presumptuous happiness dare Fate to deny him the fulfilment.

"It is not snowing now," said Adèle.

He looked up; she spoke truly. The snow had ceased, the sky was clearing, the wind was still. He passed her arm within his, and led her away by the most sheltered path.

"But this is a long way," she once said, stopping.

"Was the lime-tree a short cut?" he asked, smiling.

She hung her head abashed, and spoke no more.

They reached the outer door; they crossed the court, all white with snow, on the threshold of the

Manor. Mr. Osborne paused a moment and looked at Adèle with a smile, which she did not understand. He said nothing, but in his heart he blessed her ; in his heart he welcomed again and again to his hearth and his home this bright young guest. She shook her impatient head, dropped his arm, and sprang in. With her seemed to enter youth, beauty, and love. He watched her lightly running up the staircase, until the hem of her white garment had vanished ; then he entered the old Hall with a light in his eye and a smile on his lips, which neither had worn for many a day.

Through the range of windows before him he saw an autumn landscape, but the snow that had barely touched it was already melting in the heat of its morning sun, fervent and glowing as on a summer's morn ; and as his look wandered over mountain, lake, and sky, reddening fast beneath his gaze, late happiness seemed like that sun over that cold lake to dawn over his chill life, and give to his sad noon the heavenly freshness and the pure ardour of a second morn.

But this was not a day to give to dreams, howsoever sweet. Mr. Osborne soon remembered that he was going ; he rang, called Jean, and in a few minutes a strong, comfortable, travelling carriage, with a postillion to match, and stout, shaggy, brown horses, not handsome, indeed, but sturdy and enduring horses, that spoke of a mountain journey through wild roads, beneath overhanging pines, across foaming torrents, was waiting at the door of the Manor.

Ay, truly, and to the infinite disgust of Jeannette, who could not understand why people wanted to be married more than once, they were going away on their wedding-day to return in a week, day for day, said Adèle. She stood by the open door in travelling attire, bidding Lilian and Jeannette a light and gay adieu. She kissed Lilian again and again; she threw her arms around Jeannette's neck, and laid her fair though flushed cheek to the old woman's brown face.

"Why do you look so doleful?" she asked, putting on a pretty frown. "I know 'poor lamb' is on the tip of your tongue, only you dare not say it. Truly, one would think Monsieur Osborne is an ogre who is whipping me off and will never bring me back. I tell you I like going away with him—of course I do. Look at him as he stands there—he is as good as he is handsome."

With sad apathy Jeannette obeyed and followed the look of her young mistress. Mr. Osborne stood outside the open door, talking to the red-faced postilion, and, as his wife said, he looked good and handsome. He looked happy, too; and when he suddenly turned round, and perceiving that she was ready, took the hand of Adèle and helped her in, there was something in the mingled tenderness and respect of that little courtesy that smote on Jeannette's heart. That wild road and that wild landscape were not green Normandy; Mr. Osborne was not much like her young master, nor did Adèle, save in size, resemble the little Countess; but it was the same fond love of the grown man for the child-wife,

and Jeannette's whole soul yearned towards the husband of Adèle; he loved what she loved, even more than she did he loved it.

He turned back, he gave Lilian a kiss, he slipped something in Jeannette's hand, he entered the carriage. The brown horses shook their heads, the postillion cracked his whip, away down the stony road they rattled, and vanished.

Jeannette looked at her hand and saw there what she conceived to be a heap of gold pieces. "How rich he must be," she thought, marvelling. Mr. Osborne is anything but rich just now, and yet you are not quite in error, Jeannette. He is happy, he is in love, and happy love is richer than King Cræsus.

CHAPTER VI.

AT HOME.

THEY came back before the week was out. Late one evening the travelling carriage stopped at the gate of the Manor, which at once opened. The smiling, happy faces of Jean and Jeannette appeared behind the aperture; Jean holding the door in one hand, and his cap in the other; Jeannette bearing aloft a lamp, which shed its flickering light on the dark square mass of the carriage, touched the round haunch of one of the brown horses with a bright circle, and finally lost its shivering radiance in the vastness of the night and the gloom of the dark road.

“Hold the light nearer,” said Mr. Osborne, as he alighted.

Jeannette obeyed, and peered anxiously to catch a glimpse of the face of her young mistress; but she only saw something dark, which Mr. Osborne took in his arms and laid down softly.

“How do you feel?” he asked, stooping. The cloak in which she was wrapped fell back partly;

the dead white face of Adèle appeared for a moment like a pale lightning flash passing across the darkness of the night; the next it vanished, for dazzled by the light which Jeannette held, she hid her head against her husband.

“How do you feel?” he asked again, and without waiting for a reply, he raised her in his arms and bore her in.

“Madame is ill!” exclaimed Jean, in much dismay, and without thinking of opening the door of the Hall, an omission which the quicker-witted Jeannette at once supplied. She opened the door; she preceded them with the lamp; she pushed forward a low couch, on which Mr. Osborne laid down his wife; and, without waiting for orders, she started back to the door, and said:

“Jean, run for Docteur Guillaume.”

“Docteur Guillaume is coming,” said Mr. Osborne, and sitting down by Adele, he again asked how she felt.

“Happy!” was all she said, and throwing her arms around his neck, she embraced him with the ardent fondness of a child.

“Ah! Holy Virgin! she is very ill!” murmured Jeannette, clasping her hands.

Ay, she looked very ill indeed. Could a few days have produced so great, so sad a change? The white aspect, the hollow cheek, the sunken eyes, the fixed smile, the feverish look, spoke rather of a long, consuming disease.

“My little mistress—my little mistress!” moaned Jeannette.

He, too, seemed to undergo some strange agony of love and dread. And what strange thoughts came to him in that one moment, when he felt her cold cheek and burning lips meeting his: he saw her, pale and dead in a shroud; he stood mute and forlorn above a mound of earth; with involuntary passion, he suddenly snatched and pressed her to his heart, as if he could defy death to reach her there; then putting her away, he rose and exclaimed impatiently:

“Will Docteur Guillaume never come?”

But even as he spoke, Jean threw the door open, and, in his formal, old-fashioned servant's way, he announced—

“Monsieur le Docteur Guillaume.

Docteur Guillaume was as brisk and as cross as ever. He stepped in, bowed shortly, and his very first words were aggressive:

“Well, and what is the matter now?” he asked, sharply; he looked suspiciously at Mr. Osborne, evidently considering him the patient, and evidently, too, not much inclined to treat him tenderly—a man who could disturb him from the enjoyment of his pleasant game of draughts with the curé, for no greater illness than appeared in him then.

“My wife is ill,” said Mr. Osborne, sitting down by Adèle; “she took cold a few days ago on the lake, and has not been well since.”

Docteur Guillaume drew a deep breath, and gave Mr. Osborne and his wife two surprised looks, which they received quietly and gravely. Then having partially recovered, he took a chair, drew it near the

couch on which Adèle was reclining, felt her pulse, and looked long and attentively at her, but asked no questions.

"Madame has taken cold, as you say," he at length observed; "but it will be nothing. A little feverish. Eh! Yes, I thought so; sleepless too: I shall send you an opiate; it will be nothing."

He rose, bowed formally to them both, and left the room. Mr. Osborne seemed inclined to follow him out, but Adèle rested her head against his shoulder, and despotically forbade him to move.

"What do you want with that cross old Docteur Guillaume?" she asked; "he has a sharp, unpleasant way of looking one in the eyes. I never liked him since the day I waylaid him to know how you were."

"Why, what did he do to you then?" asked Mr. Osborne.

A light blush overspread her face, but she did not soften the truth.

"He all but told me I was in love with you: it was not true; I was not; though I did feel, that if you were to die it would break my heart."

Mr. Osborne forgot Docteur Guillaume; he forgot even for the while that Adèle was ill; he only felt and remembered the sweetness of those frank confessions of which his young wife was imprudently lavish; he made her tell him the whole story of her meeting with Doctor Guillaume, and when she had told it, he smiled: it was sweet; it was very sweet to feel and know that this young girl, whom he now

loved so much, had loved him long. But Adèle looked faint and weary.

“I think I shall go up-stairs,” she said; “oh, you need not carry me! I am not so ill as all that. Jeannette can help me if I want help. Where is Lilian? I should like to see her if she is not in bed; but if she sleeps, let her sleep; it is wearisome to lie awake and think.”

There was a vacancy and a restlessness in her manner that brought back all her husband’s uneasiness; but he had experienced some difficulty in bringing Adèle to confess that anything ailed her; he had found that to be told that she looked ill seemed to irritate her almost beyond endurance; and though he now gave her an anxious, alarmed look, all he said was—

“Rest will do you good;” and ringing the bell, he consigned her to the care of Jeannette, who had retired on the entrance of Docteur Guillaume.

“She is really ill,” thought Mr. Osborne, standing still in the centre of the room to think—“too ill for a cold; what can ail the child?”

“Monsieur le Docteur Guillaume wishes to speak to Monsieur,” said Jean, opening the door; and almost before Mr. Osborne, much surprised, could utter the words “Show him in,” the doctor had entered.

He sat down, clasped his two hands on his gold-headed cane, rested his chin on his two hands thus clasped, looked fixedly over at Mr. Osborne, and said, in his brief, emphatic way—

“Doctors are privileged; they see, they hear all;

they repeat nothing. I put no questions ; but I say this, it will not do for Mademoiselle Adèle, or, rather, for Madame Osborne, to go on fretting in this way. It is her mind, not her body, that is ill ; her mind must be relieved."

Mr. Osborne looked confounded.

"Docteur Guillaume, what are you saying?" he asked, a little indignantly. "Adèle took cold six days ago on the lake ; but no grief, no trouble can ail her, save, perhaps, that Mademoiselle de Janson, though she consented to our marriage, parted from her cousin in anger."

"You know best," drily said Docteur Guillaume, rising, "I shall send the opiate presently."

He bowed, and was turning away ; Mr. Osborne detained him.

"There is, there can be no sort of danger?" he said, anxiously.

"Not the least," was the short reply ; and with his old-fashioned courtesy, Docteur Guillaume added, "I have the honour of wishing Monsieur good evening !"

He was gone. Adèle fretting, Adèle ill through grief. The man was mad. Yet at once, without taking time to pause or think, Mr. Osborne went up to his wife's room. Adèle sat in a white morning gown, and with her loosened hair flowing around her, near the open window. Jeannette stood near her mistress.

"Leave us for a while," said Mr. Osborne.

The old woman obeyed, and closed the door. Mr. Osborne looked down at his wife.

"Adèle," he said, "Docteur Guillaume says you are not ill, but fretting ; is it true ?"

Deadly paleness overspread her face.

"Do you believe him ?" she asked, faintly.

"Child," he cried, in a tone of some passion, "do you love me ?"

She rose ; she stood before him pale but still.

"Next to God !" she said, "next to God !"

And she shook like an aspen-leaf.

He took her in his arms, and begged her to forgive him ; but Adèle had recovered enough to laugh at his remorse.

"As if I cared about either you or Docteur Guillaume !" she said, saucily. "I shall take his opiate though, when he sends it. It will seem very sweet to sleep."

Even as she spoke, Jeannette knocked, and entered with a dark phial, which Mr. Osborne took from her hand. He read the labelled instructions carefully, then slowly poured out the contents in a wine-glass. Adèle watched him curiously.

"How dark and sluggish it looks," she said, half-shivering ; "and it makes one sleep ; all Lethe in a wine-glass. Now, what would be the difference between that and a poison which kills ? the quantity, I suppose—no more. You would be sorry, William, would you not," she added, calling her husband for the first time by his Christian name, "if you were to find your wife dead to-morrow morning ?"

He was handing her the glass. She saw a nervous tremor shake his hand as she spoke, even though he

only smiled, and chid her good-humouredly for the dreary jest.

"I like people to feel my value," she replied; "and unless I remind you that I am mortal, you may not prize me, sir."

Mockingly she pledged him, and emptied the glass at once; then with strange, childish grace, she leaned her head against his shoulder, and pretended sleep sudden and overpowering, though she looked at him all the time through her half-shut eyes. How pretty was her pretty trifling; how well he liked it; how fond they were!

"She dotes on him, and he dotes on her!" thought Jeannette; "God bless them both!"

Adèle was ill six days; on the seventh morning after her return she awoke and said,—

"I feel quite well—I shall get up."

Jeannette remonstrated, and was not heeded.

"I tell you I am quite well," impatiently replied her mistress; and indeed, all languor, all fever, seemed to have left her by magic.

"They always were an obstinate family," grumbled Jeannette; "she has made up her mind that she will be well to-day, and she is well."

"Of course she is," gaily replied Adèle; "help me to dress."

Jeannette assumed an air of offended dignity, through which there pierced, strangely enough, a sense of strong, gratified pride.

“I shall not dress Madame any more,” she said; “Madame’s femme de chambre arrived last night at eleven with Madame’s corbeille.”

Adèle was twisting up her hair; surprise fixed her in the attitude, then a burning blush rushed up to her face and suffused it.

“Where is he?” she cried, eagerly; “why did he not tell me himself?—And I let him go this morning without a word. A maid and a corbeille!”

“No more than Monsieur was bound to do,” stiffly said Jeannette.

“No more! no more!” and in her indignation Adèle stamped her foot; “and pray, if I gather a flower or weed from the grass, what more do I owe the thing than a drop of fresh water? And he—but you will never understand me—never. I tell you that for me—for any woman to be taken and worn by him, is already sufficient blessing and honour; the rest is the superfluity of his own royal heart.”

The six days’ illness of his wife had rather distracted Mr. Osborne, and made “Monsieur behave a little oddly,” in Jeannette’s opinion. “But love always makes people more or less mad,” she had charitably thought. She now came to the same lenient judgment with regard to Madame’s speech. “It was all love; the poor little thing could no more help it than Monsieur could help sending twice in one night for Docteur Guillaume, who had very properly declined coming. It was all love.”

So, resignedly bearing this strange madness of Mr. Osborne and his wife, Jeannette merely suggested

that Madame should, by way of testifying her pleasure, avail herself at once of Madame Leroy's services and of the contents of the corbeille; and Jeannette more than hinted that of the two the latter would be the more acceptable. She hoped, at least, that it was not like the lady who had accompanied it.

"Oh! I hope she is not a dragon," cried Adèle, rather alarmed.

"Dragon or not, she must dress Madame this morning," resolutely replied Jeannette; and before Adèle could object or remonstrate, the maid was introduced to her mistress.

A tall, grave lady, of some thirty-five years, was Madame Leroy; majesty was her attribute. As some women are graceful and sprightly, so Madame Leroy was majestic. She had never been in a hurry in her life, she would have walked leisurely out of a house on fire; yet slow in act or speech she was not. She was simply majestic. Adèle looked at her with secret awe; benignantly Madame Leroy returned the gaze. She approved of her new mistress, and, professionally speaking, she admired her. Adèle had the sort of beauty which sets off an artist's talents—we are, every one of us, a bit selfish. She was a little wild, but Madame Leroy would alter all that in time; and when wildness is accompanied by perfect grace of motion and of look, Madame Leroy had good taste enough to know that it is not amiss. At once she assumed the authority of her position.

"Madame wants to dress and take a walk in the

garden on this lovely morning, certainly : a morning negligée toilette, of course."

It did not occur to Adèle that she could resist ; meekly and blindly she surrendered herself into Madame Leroy's hands.

This royal lady had arrived from Paris with Mr. Osborne's corbeille, as Jeannette had informed her mistress ; but the word corbeille requires explanation.

Do English bridegrooms give corbeilles, or is that custom confined to France, the land of chivalry ? A corbeille—we speak for the benefit of the ignorant, let the learned skip—may or may not be a real basket, but, fictitious or real, it holds a good many things. Indeed, it can hold anything which a bridegroom may choose to give to his wife, from a pocket-handkerchief—those of Prince D——— cost forty pounds each—to a diamond necklace. A Leghorn bonnet, a cashmere shawl, a pair of gloves, a silk dress, a lace collar, will fit in a corbeille ; it is a most capacious basket, it will hold the smallest as well as the largest objects that adorn woman ; above all, it ignores the trousseau, which is the bride's business, and of which the corbeille is wholly independent. It is given before marriage, of course—alas ! there are no corbeilles afterwards—that magic basket pays but one visit ; and if Mr. Osborne's violated that sacred rule, it was because, being a forgetful man, he had not remembered the French custom until he was married, when he had in a great hurry written off to a Paris friend—need we say of what sex—and requested her to oblige him so far as to procure him a

corbeille and a maid. By return of post Mr. Osborne received such a letter as only a French woman can write,—neat, elegant, natural, gently ironical on his forgetfulness, full of polite wishes for his happiness, and concluding with a series of appropriate questions: was Madame Osborne tall or short, plump or slender, dark or fair; in short, what was the character of her beauty, for Madame de Brieuve knew enough of her fastidious English friend to feel sure that none save a beautiful girl had stolen away his wandering liberty.

Adèle was reclining languidly in an arm-chair in her room, and Mr. Osborne was sitting by her, when he got Madame de Brieuve's letter. His wife saw him redden, smile, bite his lip, and, finally, look at her like one perplexed. She wondered what ailed him, but did not like to ask. At length a brilliant idea struck him. He rapidly drew, and speedily sent, Madame de Brieuve a portrait of his wife. It was enough. Within three days the corbeille came, under the shape of a square deal packing-case, and under the guardianship of Madame Leroy.

French women never commit mistakes in the toilet. If their laws are without appeal, it is because they are perfect—so perfect that they cannot be broken. Simply stating that there was nothing to say to this particular corbeille, save to praise it—we leave it to the number of the Boudoir (*Journal des Modes et des Salons*), in which it was analysed and gently commented upon the following week, as “another proof of the charmante Madame de B——’s tact and correct taste.” Whether the article was written by

Madame de B—— or not, does not concern this story.

The contents of that corbeille were now scattered in the room of Adèle; and Jeannette, with a secret admiration at Mr. Osborne's wealth and generosity, which she would have scorned to betray, Adèle with childish wonder, and Madame Leroy with cool majesty, were looking and examining.

"I suppose Madame will wear this morning dress," said Madame Leroy, displaying a rich, loose robe of a soft Indian silk that dazzled Adèle with its splendour.

"What a pity to put it on in the garden," she said, hesitatingly.

Jeannette was on thorns.

"When my young master was married," she said, "Madame la Comtesse, your grandmother, wore a sky-blue silk damask cloak to have her hair powdered in; and the naughty little thing used to run about the château in it, to make my young master, your grandfather, run after her, which he did, of course," added Jeannette, with a sigh; "the cloak did not last a week between them."

Adèle heard her with an abstracted smile, and told Madame Leroy to do as she pleased; the result of which judicious resolve was a negligée toilet, rich, luxurious, very careless, and the perfection of good taste. Without so much as looking at herself in the glass, Adèle went straight down to her husband's study.

Mr. Osborne was writing a business letter; but even whilst he was writing he was thinking of Adèle.

What could ail her? Was her complaint all mental? As Docteur Guillaume had bluntly said—What could ail her? When would that strange fever and languor leave her? Suddenly he felt a shadow falling on the floor between him and the sun; he looked up, and saw his wife standing before him, smiling with a silent and modest grace which he had never seen in the wild and careless girl. Yes, verily she stood there, fair and almost as blooming as ever, not in the least ill. She seemed amused at his surprise, at his pleasure, at his fond welcome, at the fond admiration with which, after a while, he put her away from him, held her out at arm's length, and smiled.

“Do you really think me so very pretty?” she asked, suddenly.

She was biting the end of a green twig which she had gathered on passing through the garden; and she spoke and looked with a sort of fixed curiosity.

“Of course I do; why do you ask?”

“Because you never showed it before we were married.”

“I had no right to do so then.”

“No right! and she gave him an odd look.

“Ay, no right! Throw that away, child; you are biting your lip; you have hurt yourself.”

He had already taken a way of calling her child, and of treating her like a child most tenderly loved indeed, but requiring fond control as well as fond caresses. And quite simply, quite naturally, Adèle had fallen into the way of obeying him blindly. At

once she threw away the offending twig, and said, submissively—

“I can walk in the garden, can I not?”

“Under my guidance I believe you can.”

The garden was very pleasant; the sun was warm; the brown mountains had a cheerful look; the green aspect of the lake was delightful.

“Oh, let me run!” cried Adèle, with sudden eagerness.

“Run after a week’s illness! no, indeed. Come this way; the wind is too keen there.”

She submitted without demur to this watchful tenderness. They went on a few yards; then suddenly she stopped short, and stood still, whilst Mr. Osborne enjoyed her surprise.

The Manor rose before them; but the little arched colonnade and portico Mr. Osborne was so fond of, were now closed. Glass frames had suddenly transformed them into a conservatory. Through the crystal front that gleamed in the sunshine Adèle saw the tall, green plants within, and the shivering gleam of a little fountain in the centre. At the head of the flight of steps, by the open door, a gorgeous bird, with yellow breast, and azure wings, and drooping tail, stood on his perch. On seeing them, he flapped his wings, and screamed.

“He welcomes his mistress,” said Mr. Osborne.

Adèle went up the steps, then paused.

“Does he bite?” she asked, prudently keeping back.

“I have experimented his temper for three successive days, and I can pronounce it perfect.”

Adèle went up to her new subject, and took him on her finger; she gently stroked and caressed him, and found him, spite his bright plumage, meek as any pale dove. Then she put him back, and entered the conservatory.

“Ah, how beautiful!” she said, clasping her hands in admiration. “Ah, how beautiful!”

Her husband laid his hand on her shoulder, and said, kindly—

“I am glad you like it. You can enter it from the drawing-room, safe from cold or air; and perhaps it will take from you the wish of running out on the cold winter days that are coming.”

She looked up at him earnestly.

“Did you have that built for me?” she asked.

“For whom else?”

“Did you buy that bird for me?”

But this time he only smiled, without replying. The question amused him. What should he want with a bird? Adèle remained very quiet. She looked at the flowers and plants one by one; she asked to know their names, and heard them seriously, like one bent on remembering what she heard. She stood by the fountain, and after a cry of admiration and surprise at the gold fish darting about in the basin—they were the first she had seen—she turned back to the bird at the door. He gave her a knowing side-look of his brown eye, and took from her hand the crumbs of cake which her husband had placed in it.

“Sit down now, you are tired,” said Mr. Osborne. He drew forward a low, rustic chair, on which Adèle

sank like one in a dream. The beautiful flowers and plants were all around her ; before her stood the bird, bowing his little body to win her attention ; behind her she heard the murmur and the splash of the little fountain. The broad stone steps descended to the sanded alley that passed between the tall evergreens on either side, and ended in a white statue in its niche ; shadow broke into sunshine, and sunshine darkened into shadow, with every cloud that floated in the blue sky above : a stillness that was not entire silence, that did not exclude the twittering of birds, the rustling of leaves, the vague breathing of the low autumn wind, enclosed the spot. Adèle gently took her husband's hand, and spaniel-like leaned her head against it.

"I shall often come and sit here," she said ; "and every time I come I shall think how good he is, how happy he wants to make me."

It was true enough. It was his ambition and his desire to make her happy, the happiest of women. Most real, therefore, was his pleasure to find her so pleased. Tenderly, though gravely, he looked down at her and smiled. She resumed :

"Where is Lilian ? Let her see and enjoy it too."

"Lilian has seen and enjoyed it all. She has broken a plant and teased the bird, this very morning. I sent her upstairs to close confinement ; but she shall be forgiven in honour of your recovery, and even dine with us this evening. Ah ! you are come back, Monsieur Morel. Well, what news do you bring ?" He addressed the foreman, whom he had

seen coming up the alley ; but Adèle had seen nothing ; with a start she dropped her husband's hand and looked up.

Monsieur Morel stood before them, as humble, as obsequious as ever. He had been a fortnight away on business ; he had learned the marriage of his master on his return, and it had roused in him a strange retrospectively jealous wrath. Spitefully, through all his external humility, he looked at Adèle. He had never liked her really, though he had strangely fancied that she liked him ; but he had known her to be rich when she seemed poor, and gold was a great deal more tempting than beauty in the eyes of M. Morel. Ay, he had seen the foolish girl's money go down the slippery path of ruin like a rolling stone he could have stopped in its course, and he found it galling to remember that this fortune, which he might so easily and would so willingly have grasped, had slipped through his fingers. And why, forsooth ! Because she would not have him !

Extraordinary ambition is rarely without the company of extraordinary impudence. And with a cool confidence in his merits and in his rights, which failure might irritate but could not destroy, M. Morel thought, as he looked moodily at the new-married pair, " I should like to know why I could not do as well for the husband of Mademoiselle Adèle as another man ? He took her without a sou, like a fool. She would be a wealthy woman still if I had had her."

" I do not bring very good news," he meekly said,

aloud ; “ there has been another failure, as Monsieur expected.”

“ Indeed,” carelessly said Mr. Osborne.

And so negligently did he treat this announcement of loss, that Adèle naturally thought : “ How rich he must be !” He quietly turned towards her, and excused himself for leaving her awhile.

“ I shall wait here for you,” she said.

“ Here ! I may be long away ; it may get cold.”

“ I shall go to my room if you like it.”

He said he did like, and praised her as the best of little girls. Adèle gave him a look half-sad, half-mirthful ; then rose, turned away, walked down the conservatory, and vanished under the door that led to the drawing-room.

Mr. Osborne looked after her until she disappeared, then he turned back and found Monsieur Morel gazing stedfastly at him.

“ So they have failed ?” he said.

“ They have. Monsieur will find the details in the counting-house.”

Mr. Osborne did not answer ; he looked absent and thoughtful.

“ I met Monsieur de Launay three days ago,” said the foreman ; “ he wanted to sound me ; but I was too deep. How could I tell whether Monsieur was inclined or not to take partners ?”

Mr. Osborne smiled slowly.

“ You behaved with your accustomed prudence,” he said.

“ Monsieur de Launay wanted me to hint at least the matter to Monsieur.”

"As you do now," interrupted Mr. Osborne.

"But he did not want me to mention our meeting," said Monsieur Morel, pointedly.

"Of course not, and by mentioning it you keep on the safe side of me, even as by mentioning the partnership you keep on the safe side of Monsieur de Launay. You are a wise man."

"Monsieur is too good."

"Not at all; but my eyes are open to all your merits."

He descended the steps; the foreman followed. He was not vexed at being read; he was prepared to find other men as keen as himself; though he was not prepared where the chances were equal to find them prevail against him. "They laugh best who laugh last," he thought, as he descended the steps after his master. "Much you know about me, clear-sighted as you are."

Little, very little, indeed, did Mr. Osborne know of that dark secret; but that little was infinite to what Monsieur Morel knew of his master. The archangel whose conquering foot crushed Satan could catch a glimpse, at least, of that rebellious spirit's heart, even as light can pierce darkness; but the fallen one gazed in vain on the celestial beauty of God's messenger; too dazzling a mystery for him to comprehend. To know heaven is to be in heaven; to understand the good is to be in some sort good.

"So he builds her conservatories, and he does not know but he may be a bankrupt to-morrow. All that for a pair of blue eyes!" thought Morel, taking the only view he could take of his master's marriage.

“Birds, too! the man is mad!” For so much expense could not be justified, even by her eyes; the only charm Morel recognised in Adèle.

Obediently she had gone up to her room; but when she opened the door and stood on the threshold, she stopped bewildered. Surely this was not the little bare room she had left two hours before. This was some enchanted bower which some good genius had touched with his wand in her absence. Alas, no! it was still her little room; love had only adorned it a little—money had only helped love. But Adèle was sixteen, and sixteen is ever reading a marvellous tale, an endless romance. She gazed around her amazed; she trod with hesitating step on a Turkey carpet; with timid hand she opened a Buhl piece of furniture, and started back on seeing her own half-frightened image looking at her from a clear mirror; then she sat down on a chair, and cried.

“Oh, Mademoiselle! Mademoiselle!” cried Jeannette, who was peeping through the slit of the door, and who expected something very different from tears.

“Oh, he must not be so kind,” exclaimed Adèle, starting to her feet; “he must not, or I am undone!”

“Ah, bah! it is not more than Madame deserves,” strongly said Jeannette; “but has Madame seen the workbox and the pretty desk? Ah, well, money is a fine thing!”

The desk, the workbox, were admired by Adèle, but more with reference to the giver than on the score of their own merits.

“Ah, how good he is!” she said, again and again.

“He builds me a conservatory; he buys me a rare bird; he gives me a room fit for a queen. There is not another man like him, not one,—is there, Jeanette?”

“Certainly not,” gravely replied the old woman. “I suppose Madame Leroy shall dress Madame for dinner?”

Adèle supposed so too; the majestic Madame Leroy appeared, and accomplished another prodigy of art, but, like great works of art, so slow, that the day, which had not stood still all this time, was nearly waning when Adèle went down to the Hall to preside for the first time at her husband’s board.

Mr. Osborne was sitting near one of the windows, and Lilian was perched on his knee. She jumped down on seeing Adèle, and ran up to her with an admiring cry.

“Oh, how beautiful you are!” then followed separate, minute ecstasies on everything Adèle wore, with which we need not trouble the reader. Lilian was like the world; Adèle in her brown frock and Adèle in shining silken attire were not the same being. The one had never been but a little girl to play with; the other was a lovely lady to call mamma and be fond of.

“Everything comes to me through him,” thought Adèle, even whilst she caressed Lilian; “everything, ay, even the fondness of his little girl.”

The dinner was quiet and not too long. Once or twice Adèle looked up at her husband dubiously, and at length she said,—

“If I commit mistakes, pray tell me—I shall not

mind—I wish to do everything as you wish—as is right.”

Mr. Osborne's only reply was to drink the health of Mrs. Osborne in some of that lady's own wine; the health of Miss Osborne followed, then Mrs. Osborne was pledged again by her husband. Was it the wine or was it pleasure that made his dark eyes shine rather more than was their wont; that gave his calm, handsome face a flushed look, a happy smile, and to his whole aspect something rather triumphant? He did feel in a most happy mood. He had made a vow not to think of business until sunrise, and he kept it religiously. He had plenty else to think of. He had had his cares, his trials, his miseries, like other men; like other men, too, he now had one of those happy hours which the bountiful hand of God showers on all men, on the whole broad earth.

He had it, and he enjoyed it thoroughly. He felt himself, William Osborne, a man of thirty, strong, handsome, in the prime of life, independent, too; master of a fine old house, and very respectable cellar, and of all the appendages to both. He saw himself sitting in an ancient Hall, with the fire shining back from its panels of warm, brown oak; before him was spread cheer abundant and good; crystal and plate sparkled on his table; ruby wine filled his glass; it was pleasant,—ay, truly, it was cheering and genial to be master of these good things; and better than house, good table, and good wine, it was to glance at the pretty child on his left, and know that she was his child; to look at the

blooming young wife before him, and rejoice with a man's pride as well as with a man's fondness, that she was his, and none but his.

And now the dinner is over. Lilian has been dismissed by her papa, who wishes to remain alone with his wife. A kind kiss and a plateful of cakes have reconciled Lilian to her exile; father and daughter part in mutual amity. No tiresome childish jealousy embitters Mr. Osborne's hours of love. His little girl is a good little girl, who does not fret herself and torment him because she has a rival already more fondly loved than she is in her father's heart. Mr. Osborne's conscience does not reproach him for the preference: a lover, a husband, will carry off Lilian in a few years. And Adèle is his own little Adèle for ever. God gave her and God alone can take her away from her husband's arms. There she shall remain to the end of both their beauty and their youth; to the consummation of their years; to the close of their mortal life, and the dawn of the heavenly.

Not that Mr. Osborne is thinking of that just now; no, he is sitting by the fire, and his wife is sitting on her stool at his feet. The firelight plays on her face, and shines back from her eyes, raised and fixed full on his as his are bent on hers.

"I have seen my room," she said; "I see you want to turn my life into a fairy tale. What was I when you found me? a little Cinderella, obscure and forlorn; a fallen princess, poorer than any peasant-girl. And you have given me back the kingdom I had lost, and more; you have dressed me in costly

silks and laces such as I never wore before ; you have changed my poor little room into the boudoir of a lady."

"And I am the prince, too, as well as the godmother," said Mr. Osborne, raising her, and drawing her towards him.

"You are my prince and my king," she said, with some vehemence. "You are all I have ; what can I say to you?—that I am grateful, you would not like it. I can say nothing, save that from the first moment when I saw you enter this room, and I looked up at you still on my knees, I thought you looked like a good angel ; and truly a good angel you have been to me."

She spoke in a low voice steady and clear. He pressed her to his heart ; he called her by the dearest name he could find ; he called her his wife ; and pure, perfect content passed like sunlight over his noble and handsome face.

Truly he loved her very much. He had found her without seeking, as some traveller may find, amidst the stones of his arid path, a gem of great price. He did not wish for it ; he does not want it ; this boundless treasure makes him none the richer ; but he cannot and will not restore it ; it is a thing to wear hidden near his heart, to rejoice over in secret, a most useless and costly joy. Mr. Osborne had not wished for his young wife ; he had found her, taken her, and now he loved her. She was a tie, a burden, a new care ; but he loved her infinitely, for all that.

CHAPTER VII.

A FIRST PARTING.

THE day was dark, sullen, and gusty; swollen clouds passed along the sky, or dropped in thin mists above the brown edge of the mountains; autumn gales moaned above the grey lake, and bowed the pines on the hill side.

Adèle stood in one of the deep windows of the Hall looking at them; she saw them bend and rise again, and she smiled. "There is no hope for you," she thought, "none! the wind and the storm are your masters; you are bound to your place of torment without hope of redemption. Then bear your lot! Often on stormy days like this, often on bleak nights when I lay warm in bed between sleep and waking, I have heard your moanings, and I have pitied you; and what has your lamenting—what has my pity availed you? You were made to rejoice for a little while in sunshine and summer breeze, to be vexed by unquiet winds, and beaten by angry rains—your final end to be uprooted by the storm, or felled by the woodman's axe. Then

bear your lot, I say ; it will not last—nothing lasts—it seems eternal now. Be patient ; when you lie dead and withered on the mountain, you will be safe—oh, then you can defy the might and passion of the fiercest storm.”

Mr. Osborne was reclining on a low couch by the blazing wood fire ; papers were scattered around him, but he had dropped them to think, and his thoughts did not seem pleasant. With a sigh he looked up and searched for Adèle. He saw her standing in the window, leaning against the wall with drooping arms and clasped hands. Her cheek was colourless ; her eyes were sunken, dark, and fixed ; pale were her parted lips. He started uneasily.

“ Child,” he said, “ what ails you ?”

She turned round laughing.

“ What should ail me ? I am only looking at those trees. I left you because I saw you were busy. What ails you, rather, sir ?” she added, coming back to him, and sitting down by his side. “ I know those letters teased you ; I saw you bite your lip. Put them away, and rest.”

* She pushed the papers on one side, and clasped her two arms around his neck. He submitted ; his head sank on her shoulder. He sent the weary cares of life back, far back into oblivion and night ; and for the moment remembering only her, he felt like one who has drunk of some divine opiate, calmly blest.

It might be folly, but he could not help it. The sweetness of that new existence had stolen over him

with the subtle power of enchantment. He had married from Honour, and instead of finding Duty between him and his bride, he had found Love, a divine child, slumbering in her arms. It was, as if Adèle had said to him with smiling defiance: "If you have me, you must have Love too; never can we be divided." He yielded, and who would have resisted. Passion called him, and he obeyed her voice. She awoke him from the torpor of years to a younger and a newer existence; she melted the long chill from his life, and sent coldness to the winds; she taught him how dearer far than the dearest solitude can be a loved presence.

"Love and be loved, whilst you can," she said; "enjoy the feeling none can disturb, the tie fondness can make more dear and has not—rare and holy privilege!—the power to profane." He obeyed her. Truly it was the cup of Circe, and he drank it drop by drop, and every drop seemed sweeter than the last to a heart long athirst and never sated.

Suddenly he started: the wind had brought him the sound of a distant clock striking the hours in a mountain church. He unclasped her arms and rose.

"I must go," he said.

"Go?" she cried amazed.

"Yes, I could not bear to tell you till the last moment. Good-bye! God bless you."

"You must be jesting," she said.

"Would I were. I shall not be long away. Do not cry. Take care of yourself and of Lilian. Indeed, I shall not be long away."

"And you are going now—now."

“Ay now. I thought I had another hour, and I have not.”

He looked so reluctant to go, so pained to leave her, that Adèle could not have reproached him, even if she would; but her heart had no room for accusation; she submitted without a word; she accompanied him to the gate; there they both paused for the final parting, whilst Joli, held by Jean, who discreetly looked down the bleak wild road, quietly waited for his rider.

“No, no, you must not go, or you must take me with you,” cried Adèle, with a sudden passion of sobs and tears. “I tell you I cannot stay here without you. If I do I am undone. Stay or take me.”

“I cannot.”

“You must.”

She clung to him with feverish ardour. He felt himself growing very weak: he would not argue, for to argue was to yield. He stooped, he kissed her again and again, then he suddenly disengaged himself from her arms, and was gone in a moment. Joli galloped away, and his rider did not venture to look back until the delving road had hid the Manor.

He had conquered, yet he was angry with himself. Why had he not taken her with him? the season was not so bleak that she could not travel. She asked to come, and he wished it in his heart; for he might be, not days, but weeks away, weeks without seeing her.

“Is life so long,” he asked of his own thoughts, “that we should cast away its dearest prizes as things

of no worth. The happiest confess it, the first sweetness of love does not linger. Something else comes, much better of course, and much wiser, but, alas! it is not that! it is not the bloom of the flower; the first breath, the delightful promise of spring. Years will come to us both, years and their coldness. Shall I trust to a doubtful Future. To-day is barely mine—shall I count on to-morrow?"

He hesitated no more. He turned the head of his horse, and rode back. It was weakness and folly; but what matter, and what need he care?

He passed by the closed Manor, and rode round to the counting-house. He had to countermand some orders which he had given to M. Morel, and to give some new orders, which his change of purpose required. And he wished to do this at once and be free. He found M. Morel, as usual, sallow, diligent and zealous.

"I presume Monsieur is come to see to the matter I mentioned yesterday?" he began.

"There is time enough for that," interrupted Mr. Osborne; "I am not going to-day. You will please to attend to these instructions," he rapidly wrote down a few lines, handed them to the foreman, and left.

M. Morel bit the end of his pen, and looked after his patron. "There is an end to all things," he said to himself, "even to love—and to business too sometimes."

He took up the paper which Mr. Osborne had left, and looked at it moodily. His eyes read, but

his thoughts were absent: he seemed fixed into sullen meditation.

Mr. Osborne entered the garden by a low door, of which he always carried the key in his pocket, and walked straight to the Manor. But, before reaching it, he paused; in the alley of evergreens that led to the new conservatory, he had heard the voice of his wife. He looked round sharply: a gap in the row of trees showed her to him standing in the centre of the alley. He bit his lip with displeasure; she was bareheaded; she wore neither cloak nor shawl; the keen wind blew the hair from her pale face and fluttered her silk dress around her thinly-clad feet.

"Mademoiselle, Madame, I mean, this is dreadful!" cried Jeannette, who unceremoniously held her mistress's lace sleeve. "You will kill yourself—you must not go."

A frown gathered on the smooth brow of Adèle. She turned coldly on the old woman, and said briefly:

"Let me go, Jeannette."

"I will not: Madame is married, but none the wiser."

Adèle stamped her foot: a strange, stern expression passed athwart her gentle, little face as lightning may pass across a pale sky. "I am not married to-day," she cried; "I am not married to-day."

"Ay, it is a month to-day," said Jeannette, who had not heard rightly; "a month this very day."

Adèle clasped her hands to her brow, and looked half wild.

“A month?” she moaned, “a month! Why did I not die a month ago?”

Her pale face, her look, her tone, breathed misery and despair. Jeannette dropped the sleeve of her mistress and looked petrified. Adèle darted down the alley, and vanished.

Mr. Osborne looked neither right nor left, but went on; he entered the house, he ascended the staircase, he never paused until he reached the room of his wife. Then, indeed, he looked around him, and asked himself what had brought him there.

What had brought him? The instinct of suffering, that sends us in grief to the very spots where we have been most blest. In that room he had found his Paradise and his Eve, and there he now met his serpent; for, alas! we all have ours. Her work lay thrown on the table; ay, he had snatched it that morning from her hand, and pacified her with a kiss; her drawing was turned to the wall; foolish and fond had been yesterday's lesson. Stung to the heart, trembling with anger and shame, he turned away, and her pale, sleeping face resting on the pillow of the low, simple bed, rose before him, as he had seen it during the vigils of her seven days' illness, during those nights when sitting by her he had either trembled lest death should snatch away his newly-found treasure, or indulged in the hopes of a future, which seemed to his craving heart as if it never could be too sweet.

And now, he remembered the face of pale revolt he had seen in the garden. And now, oh, misery! misery! he knew what his fancied bliss had all the

time been worth, how he had never had a wife, never for one moment; never, but a sad, a rebellious girl, who laughed when her heart was breaking; who when she threw her arms around his neck so fondly that morning, would have preferred solitude on the most arid mountain peak, to the pleasant fire-side with him. He bit his lip, he breathed hard. The mere thought exasperated him to a sort of fury. Proud, delicate in all his feelings, sensitive to weakness, it revolted him to think that his love had been an infliction, that he had been endured as a duty, not welcomed as bringing happiness. Endured! Insult from woman to man could not go beyond this. And yet with all this anger there blended a keen, fond sorrow he could not control; something that seemed to cry within him, "Lost and gone—lost, lost for ever." Something that made him stoop; and pressing his lips on the pillow of his wife, lay his head there and cry like a child. For, alas! if he was not loved, he could not at once cease to love. He had wakened with Adèle in his heart that morning, and she could not have left it before the night. But it was soon over. Soon he rose, drearily looked around him, and drearily thought, "I married her a month ago."

Ay, she was his wife. That girl who had said, "I am not married to-day," to whom his absence had been what liberty is to the slave, that girl who had raised the despairing cry, "Why did I not die a month ago?" was his wife. His wife! he laughed with bitter anger; it was the same thought again and again; the same pain that could not weary of

its sting. He paced the narrow room up and down, and called up the tormenting past. He saw her once more with that submission which had enchanted him, because he thought that it sprang from the silent acquiescence of a happy heart, and which was the result of inexorable will, strange in one so young. The fond hours that had been so delightful now haunted him like spectres. Folly, passion, love, weakness, had filled them to overflowing. How sweet they had been—how more bitter by far than wormwood they were now to his proud heart!

Alas! her years, which had scarcely left childhood behind, her ignorance, which was entire, had undone him. He would have given more of what is called his confidence to an older woman; that is to say, he would have told her his business, his fears, his anxieties, but he would have locked up his heart from her penetrating gaze; his very fondness would have been tempered with reserve and dignity. And with Adèle he had hidden nothing. He had laid himself open to her from the first day to the last. For what was she? a fond little girl, who only wanted to be cherished and beloved! And that mere child of sixteen had deceived him! That light, girlish look had beheld in him a man—a man of thirty—those fitful weaknesses which love can never see, for it shares them. His very heart burned with resentment at the thought, and with a resentment that soon shaped itself into a resolve.

Mr. Osborne had many high and noble qualities, but he had also one fault that comprises many—a silent, sullen temper. He never got angry, or, at

least, rarely : he seldom spoke in a passion ; but in proportion to the sensitiveness that made him careful with others, he jealously brooded over an offence, and rarely forgot a wrong.

Why speak to Adèle—question or upbraid her ? It was useless, worse than useless ; what he had learned in a moment from her lips, the experience of a few more weeks would have told him as plainly, as bitterly. Upbraidings lead to strife—strife to misery. In silence he would bear his share ; in silence she should bear hers. Their wedded life would be unblest and cold ; children not born of love would spring and grow around them ; but the scenes, the quarrels, the bitter recriminations of his first marriage, should never sully his second. And with sullen anger he vowed, too, that though Adèle should never be able to tax him with coldness, neglect, or unkindness, she should never again find him what he had been ; the husband she should have—it was not in his power to break that tie—but never more the lover.

And alas ! he could take that vow. For a month he had laid himself at the feet of a careless child, indulged with passionate ardour in a happy delusion, but with that delusion vanished ardour and passion. He awoke from the burning dream ; a cold, icy hand was laid on his heart, and stilled it like death. “ What I have borne once I can bear again,” he thought. “ My first wife deceived me, why should the second be more true ? At least, I did not marry *her* for love. No blind passion, no fond fancy, threw me helpless on the mercy of a girl. I took her from

honour, from duty. I thought I had found love, too, a wife as well as a woman. Well, it was a mistake, no more. It can be borne, my poor little Adèle."

He left her room, descended the staircase, crossed the garden, and met no one.

M. Morel was busy writing, but the opening door behind him made him look round. He turned, and saw his patron. Mr. Osborne was always pale, but now he was white ; his brow, his cheek, his lip, were rigid and colourless. His look was no longer calm and dreamy, but intent and fixed, like that of one who has found some thought to grasp and contend with. He said not a word, but walked to the desk, took up the paper he had written on a little while before, and tore it to pieces. This done, he walked out.

Monsieur Morel looked after him, and soon heard him riding away. He shook his head, and smiled. "They have quarrelled," he said.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE PICTURE.

SWIFT and wild as a bird who has escaped from its cage into air and liberty, Adèle ran on until she reached the orchard. There she paused breathless, and sank down in the grass. She heeded not her dress of silk; she cared not for the cold; she only wanted to forget, to annihilate, the last few weeks, and be again what she had been.

She lay down, and clasped her hands above her head; but alas! the grass was dewy and chill, the trees were bare, the sky was wild, the birds sang no more, and silent, silent as death was her sad heart. Oh, to be a careless child again, to cross the fatal threshold that divides the girl from the woman, and, looking at the blue sky, listening to the blackbird's song, to sing old ballads, and dream how "the world was coming—coming fast!"

Tears rushed to her eyes, her heart swelled, she broke into passionate sobs. "I was so happy," she thought; "I had not a thought—not a care—not one—and now!" Her moans rose and mingled with

the wind that swept above her. She was little more than a child—like a child she wept. He whose presence had given her strength to suffer in silence was gone—gone with that fond, watchful eye she could not escape; she could cry and lament to her heart's content; no more need she stifle her tears lest they should waken him from his calm sleep by her side. No more need she smile and laugh lest he should wonder why she sighed with her hand clasped in his. Her tears flowed until they could flow no more—until her heavy eyes closed, and her sobs were stilled in mute grief, until gathering gloom fell around her. Then she rose: torpid, cold, and slow she re-entered the house. She went up to her room; a lighted lamp stood on the table; her work, her book, were by it; but Adèle sat down on a low couch, and looked at the fire dying slowly on the hearth. With fixed, apathetic gaze, with hands listlessly clasped on her knees, she looked at it; and thus she sat hours.

At eleven the door opened: Jeannette stood before her mistress.

Adèle rose with a sudden spring, as if she were facing an enemy. Sadly and gravely Jeannette returned the glance of her mistress.

“Madame, I must speak to you,” she said.

“Speak!” haughtily replied Adèle, “but mind what you say.”

Jeannette burst into a passion of tears, and clasped her trembling hands.

“Oh, Madame!” she cried, “do, for Heaven’s sake, Madame, do love your husband.”

Adèle bit her lip, reddened, turned up her eyes, and finally looked down, and laughed frankly.

“Jeannette,” she said, sinking back into her reclining attitude, and stretching out her little white hand towards the old woman, “sit down by me, and do not be foolish.”

She spoke with all her old gaiety and lightness. Jeannette looked bewildered at the sudden change, but she obeyed. She sat down on the edge of the couch, and looked doubtfully at Adèle, who only laughed again, and seemed very much amused.

“What have you been dreaming of?” she asked, “that you walk in, and tell me to love Monsieur Osborne in that strange, oracular way? Love him! why you know I adore him! And if it were not that you have been dreaming, I should be quite angry with you.”

“Madame, I did not dream what you said in the garden this day. Oh, you must love him more, or rather differently; and indeed, Madame, you ought. He is only a very little older than he might be; he is as good-looking a gentleman as one need wish for a husband.”

“I never heard anything like it!” angrily interrupted Adèle. “What do you mean? Why, my husband is quite a young man! Good-looking, indeed! why he is remarkably handsome!—twice as handsome as I am; twice as good, and twice as everything! What amazes me is why and how he became fond of me. I am pretty, to be sure; but there are so many pretty girls! Why did he not fall in love with that beautiful Italian lady whose sketch

he showed me the other day? She was rich, well born, his friend; and, oh, Jeannette, a daisy in the grass might as well vie with a lily on its stem, as I with her. Why did his eye rest—why did his fancy fall—on a poor, careless, little thing like me? That is what ought to amaze you as it amazes me, old Jeannette!”

She spoke softly now; and to atone for her previous sharpness, she gently stroked the old woman's brown hand. But Jeannette's amazement did not take the direction into which her mistress seemed to wish to lead it.

“In Heaven's name, Madame,” she said, with some emotion; “why then did you wish yourself dead this morning?”

“Because I did then—because I do nine times a day—because it makes me mad to be married—because I feel fettered like one that is bound hand and foot—stifled like one that has not air to breathe; and when I feel it too strongly, oh! then I must wish for any release—even for that of death!”

She spoke with such feverish passion, such a captive-like longing for liberty passed over her pale face, that Jeannette was startled and frightened at its intensity.

“Oh! Mademoiselle!” she cried, distressed; “what have you done?”

“Yes,” replied Adèle, with sad carelessness; “I have been a foolish bird; I was as merry as a lark; I sang from morning until night, and I was free. He had only to whistle for me and I came at once, glad to be caught. And because I liked him, I

thought I should not care to have my wings clipped, and that I could still sing in a cage. And now, I cannot. Oh! I cannot—I can only pine and moan for my lost liberty. And yet—and yet——” she added, with a smile at her own waywardness, “I do believe I would do it all again if it were to be done. Oh, Jeannette, I do love him so much, he is so good, so admirable—so handsome!” she added, giving her old friend a mischievous look.

“And so fond of Madame!” put in Jeannette, with a nod.

“Yes—yes,” impatiently sighed Adèle; “but I do love him, only,” she added, with a moan, “why did he marry me? friends love, but do not marry.”

“But, Mademoiselle, why did *you* marry him?” not unreasonably asked Jeannette.

“How tiresome you are!” said Adèle, looking provoked; “what foolish questions you do put, old Jeannette! Ask the wind why it blows; ask a bird why it sings; ask a child why it laughs and cries in a breath, and when they have answered you fairly, ask me why I do this or do that. I know nothing about it. I have always done what I liked, laughed when I was merry, cried when I was sad, and never given a thought to the coming day, never asked myself shall I like to-night what I like this morning. Besides, it seemed a beautiful and a noble thing to be the wife of William Osborne. Say to a peasant girl, will you be queen, wear a crown, sit on a throne, rule a land, and never stir without a body-guard to attend you? She will clap her hands and cry, yes. Ah! how she will repent it! how she

will wish her crown were on a bush, and that her people had another ruler! How she will long to run bare-foot in the dew of the morning—how she will break her heart because she has lost liberty; liberty without which there is no blessing! Like her, I have been offered, and I have accepted, a kingdom and a crown; a good, an accomplished gentleman's heart. How happy I should be if I could but lie there, content to love my life away! Why am I so restless and so wild? Why is his fondness so delightful and yet so tormenting? It makes my heart beat and swell with tenderness and pride to be so much loved by him—the peasant girl is glad to be queen, you see,—and I would give worlds that he would let me be quiet and forget me. I am too young—I am too young.”

The exclamation was uttered with a pathos that moved Jeannette's heart; but all she could say, was:

“Ah! Madame, why did you marry him?”

“How could I help it, when he asked me?”

“Indeed, Madame, you found the means of saying your godmother nay.”

“Had she ever given a kind look, a smile, a pleasant word! And he! had he not from the first been as pleasant as the pleasant wind that blows from the west. Have you been fond of your young master, and do you not know that one must ever put oneself at the feet of what one loves.”

“Madame, Madame, what are you saying? If I could have been my young master's wife—it was impossible—but if I could have been his wife, how I would have sickened at the thought of death!”

"I am not very sure that I do really wish to die," honestly said Adèle.

"Ah! but how I would have prayed for longer days to spend with him, how I would have wished that the years might have no ending. Oh! do not laugh, Madame, do not. Think how dreadful a thing it is to wish undone that which God himself has done: it is like flying in the face of the Almighty."

Adèle became crimson, and her eyes sparkled angrily. "And who told you that I wished it undone?" she asked. "I may wish that it had not been done; that he had liked some one else; but what is—is. I am his wife, he is my husband. It is done for ever and for ever. How could you construe so harshly a few hasty words? I am young, only sixteen. I have always had my own way; I have never suffered; and if this new pain draws a cry from me, do not mind it. It will pass away: there is a very sweet drop in all this bitterness; he is fond of me—I do not deserve it—I am a perverse, naughty child, and an ingrate too, but he is fond of me. I am a little wild still, but he is so gentle and so kind, that he will tame me and make me good like himself in time.—Wish it undone! It would be a sin—it would be a folly. I do not—I do not."

She was obstinate and indignant now; but her eye was sad, her haughty smile made Jeannette's heart ache.

"And you will try and love him," she said; "you can if you like, Madame; and if you will but let me

undress you, I will, when you are in bed, tell you a story that will show you how one need not marry for love in order to fall in love with one's husband."

Adèle smiled a little sadly, but out of very weariness she submitted. In a few minutes her head was resting on her pillow, and Jeannette, sitting at the foot of the bed, began her narrative.

"My young master's wife had an old nurse who had reared her as I have reared Mademoiselle. Her name was Goton; she was fond of her mistress and fond of me too; and once—that was the very year before she died—she told me what I could not have known but for her, the story of my young master's marriage. He once went to see his aunt, who was an abbess in a convent, and whilst he was talking to her at the grating, Mademoiselle de Lenart—that was her name—crossed the parloir. He fell in love with her that very moment; the next day he asked her in marriage, and within a week he married her. Well, he had brought her home, and she was resting for a moment in a little saloon that had been fitted up for that purpose, and he was looking at her as pleased as pleased could be, when all at once she turned round, and in the hearing of her old nurse she said to him, 'Sir, I have married you, but remember that you have never asked me if I liked you.' Poor gentleman! how was he to ask her when he had never been left two minutes alone with her? 'And now,' added the little lady, quite angrily, 'I warn you, that I do not like you, and that I never shall like you.' Well, that was a sad speech for a

poor young husband in love to hear on his wedding day. Goton said that he staggered and turned quite white; then he sank down on one knee before his wife and laid his hand on his heart. Ah! in those days men knew how to love, and he said, 'Madame, would to Heaven that I could give you back the freedom of which I have robbed you; but since I cannot do that, I will do the only thing in my power, I will either make you love me'—here Goton said she looked quite scornful at him—'or I will die,' he added, sighing, as if his heart were going to break; and Goton declared he seemed ready to expire with grief, but so handsome with it all, that he looked more like an angel than like a man. Well, his little wife had a hot temper and a warm heart; she softened, and said that with time she might like him a little, but not yet nor in the way of love. Ah, well, my young master was a good gentleman, but he was in love, and lovers are full of tricks. Instead of being comforted, he became like one mad, laid his hand on the hilt of his sword, and wanted to rush out to kill himself. Poor child! she was fifteen, and knew nothing of men; she caught hold of his coat and vowed, quite frightened, that she already liked him more. But though he turned back, he said it was only her angelic goodness made her speak so, that he knew she did not, and never could love him; that he was a wretch who had deprived her of liberty and happiness, and that the only thing for them both was, that he should die, make her mistress of all he possessed, and leave her free to bless a happier man. On hearing that she cried as if her

heart would break, but he only got on worse. 'All he wanted,' he said, 'was to kiss her hand once before he died.' Well, well, if men are odd, women are odd too; and I cannot help thinking that if some one has got my young master's eyes, some one has also got some of my young master's wife's temper and ways. Instead of giving him her hand to kiss, she threw her arms around his neck, and kissed him quite fondly, and said he was not to die on any account, but to live, for that she loved him and only him, and would not be the wife of any one else for all the world held. When he had got her to that point, there he kept her, you may be sure, not merely for that day, but for ever afterwards; yet there was no need. Madame told Goton later that she had really fallen in love with him when he first knelt down looking so handsome and so unhappy. And fond enough of him she was, and a little jealous, too, though without cause. But he was a handsome man, and gallant with women, who all liked him, and I think it was on account of a certain great beauty who lived hard by, and to teaze him, that she let the Marquis kiss her hand in the play; and what does all that prove?" added Jeannette, breaking off, "why, that a woman can fall in love with her husband if she chooses."

But she waited in vain for Adèle to dispute the axiom: Adèle was fast asleep.

"Youth is youth, after all," thought Jeannette, sighing; "it will sleep, eat, and drink, no matter what comes."

But Jeannette did not sleep that night. She sat

and watched by the bed of Mr. Osborne's wife until dawn ; she felt dismayed and distracted. The lightness of Adèle did not deceive her. She knew it was the young girl's temper to pass suddenly from mood to mood, and that, brave by nature, she could smile and defy sorrow with heroic carelessness. Adèle was sleeping like a child now, as peaceful, as pretty in her slumbers as childhood and innocence, but Jeannette saw the thunder-cloud still lurking in that serene sky, and she lamented to think it must break some day. Who that, seeing and hearing this young bride with her husband, would not have thought her the fondest of wives and happiest of women? And she was wishing herself dead all the time—all the time her passionate young heart was in revolt, and her being in insurrection.

“And she is of old blood, of wild blood,” thought Jeannette, groaning inwardly, “of a race where the men were fierce and the women uncontrollable. She is fond of him in her own way, but well as she likes him, and much as he loves her, the little thing will yet do something desperate and strange, if it were only to show that she is one of the great and wicked old De Courcelles. God bless her, poor darling ! poor lamb ! it is no fault of hers, they have all been so.”

Are the theories of race a dream ? Do the pride of the tyrant and the broken spirit of the slave go down from father to son ?—a fatal inheritance. Adèle was fond and tender like a girl, a gay democrat of sixteen, too, a derider of the past, a careless lover of the present, but thirty generations of imperious women

and men, who never owned a law save that of their own wild will, had not transmitted her their blood in vain. She could not submit, she could not obey. Her lonely, unloved, unfettered youth, which had given her the delightful wildness, the fresh, original grace that had fascinated Mr. Osborne, had helped her natural temper but too well. She had never known control, she had learned to care about nothing and no one, and she had grown up in the convenient doctrine that whatever she pleased to do was right. She was pure in thought and deed, gentle in the main, easily pleased, very easily made happy. Jeannette's old stories to laugh at, the old house and garden to run in, the dreams of youth to charm her idle hours were sufficient, until Mr. Osborne suddenly broke on her solitude.

At once she conceived a sort of passion for him—the passion which girls feel for the first superior man or woman they fall in with, the fervent enthusiasm of a neophyte for a beloved teacher, the blind devotedness of a partisan for a chief, but not love, not even friendship, for it does not assume equality as possible, and looks up to no return. Adèle did not dream that Mr. Osborne could love her, not even that he could care much about her. Why should he? He so perfect, she so insignificant. The proofs of liking he gave her touched her deeply; his offer of marriage frightened her a little, but dazzled her a great deal more. It was, as she had said, being offered a crown; too glorious a destiny to be rejected. The suddenness of their marriage gave her little time to think. Pride, wilfulness, a natural

loyalty that shrank from the breaking of a promise, would not let her heed Mademoiselle de Janson's warnings or retract. It pleased him to have her, it pleased her to marry him, and she would marry him, *quand même*. She did. She had her will, and she found that though it did not please her to be the wife even of Mr. Osborne, the deed could not be undone. And this bond which she could not break, this yoke which she must bear, stung her, until there were moments when she felt that she must break into open revolt or die. Love, indeed, can rule the proudest hearts and tame the wildest tempers ; but Adèle was too young for love, for passion, for marriage ; too young for anything but the careless liberty of a careless girl. Her enthusiastic affection might look enough like love to deceive them both, but it was not it at all ; it was not, moreover, the feeling that makes a happy marriage.

Worship implies distance ; we kneel and look up to adore ; but love is equality ; it gives and receives ; it feeds on the exchange of two beings and two hearts. Mr. Osborne could only smile and be amused at his wife's fond admiration of his perfections ; it could not satisfy him ; he wanted to love her and be loved ; not to sit the calm, unmoved Jove of a domestic Olympus, breathing in incense. He wanted to love and be loved ; natural desire, that proved the source of all her woe.

And far more bitter than she had hinted to Jeanette had been her brief married life to Adèle. Her husband had prepared her for a life calm though happy, for an affection serene though deep, and in-

stead of that, he had borne her into a region of passion and exacting fondness, which she had never, even in thought, conceived, which she was too young and too careless to like, too ignorant to understand. Why was she to be for ever chained to his side? Why was she to be made to feel, from morning till night, that she was lovely in his sight—delightful to his heart? Was this enamoured lover the kind and calm Mr. Osborne? Was this fond husband the reserved gentleman who once read and talked with his little friend, and who now had but one endless tale to tell to his young wife? With secret irritation, with secret woe, she submitted to a tenderness she had no right to repel, to a love which she had accepted for once and for ever; but she suffered keenly and strangely. The struggle became intolerable; her health failed, her sleep fled, languor and fever consumed her. With the words of Docteur Guillaume, a glimpse of the truth flashed across Mr. Osborne's mind on the evening of their return; he saw it in one glance; she did not like him; but the next moment his faith returned. How could he doubt her reply to his question—"Next to God?" Did not her words, her looks, her caresses, breathe affection and fondness?

Alas! there was the mischief. She could speak so, she could be that, and not lie. She could delude, and yet not deceive him. She did love him with her whole heart. It was the worst of her lot that she admired him infinitely, that she was tenderly proud, and more tenderly fond, of her husband. There were even provoking moments when an irresistible

impulse sent her to his side playful and caressing. There were times when she wondered what imperfection of her nature prevented her from being in love with that perfect man, when, half through vexation at her folly, half because it pleased her to be fond, she overwhelmed him with a sudden tenderness of which he did not guess the fitful nature, of which he only felt the enchanting sweetness. And when she had succeeded but too well in rousing an affection that never slumbered long, when these wayward ways, these girlish caprices, these alternatives of coolness and fondness that irritate a man, but charm even more than they provoke him, had made Mr. Osborne rather fonder of his wife than he was before, Adèle relapsed into sullen misery, and passionately wished herself dead.

It was wrong—it was very wrong indeed; she ought, having committed a sad mistake, to have borne it meekly and patiently; but there is something in the plea she offered up for herself: she was young, very young, and she had never suffered.

CHAPTER IX.

AN ARRIVAL.

EARLY the next morning, Jeannette sought and found a favourable opportunity to address some more words of good counsel to her mistress. She had discovered a stock of such clear, convincing, irresistible arguments, that if Adèle did not put them to profit, the fault was surely her own, and not Jeannette's.

Adèle was sitting by the open door of the conservatory; the morning sun shone on her bare head; her cheek was resting on her hand; her eyes were fixed on the statue at the end of the alley; she had a pale but resolute look. Scarcely had Jeannette begun, scarcely had she opened her mouth, when the hand of her young mistress was laid on her lips.

"We have spoken for the first and last time on that subject," she observed, in a decisive tone. "I was foolish yesterday; I scarcely knew what I said; all nonsense at which I laugh to-day. All I know is this—I am the wife of a good, handsome, and rich gentleman, who loves me, and whom I am fond of; and I am the happiest of women."

She spoke gaily, kindly, but in a tone that admitted of no reply.

In vain Jeannette looked at her wistfully; the eyes of Adèle remained inexorable, though smiling; Mr. Osborne was to be spoken of no more.

"Send me Lilian," she resumed, "I feel very lonely this morning."

"There is no making her out," thought Jeannette, bewildered; "when you think you have her, she slips through your fingers. I suppose she wants him back now?"

Perhaps she did; perhaps his absence was a pain different from the pain of his presence, but as keen. In a few minutes Jeannette returned, bringing Lilian through the conservatory.

"Mademoiselle, you must not run here," began Jeannette.

Vain remonstrance! Lilian had seen her young stepmother, and, dropping Jeannette's hand, she had bounded towards her joyously. Adèle received her fondly. She took Lilian on her knee; she clasped her arms around Mr. Osborne's child; she kissed her again and again; and Jeannette, who was lingering in the conservatory, heard Lilian saying—

"Why are you crying? You are not going away, are you?"

"Oh, no! but he is not here, Lilian, he is not here."

Jeannette heard no more. Adèle rose, took Lilian by the hand, and ran down the alley with her. Lilian laughed, and Adèle echoed the laugh very gaily. The day was fine, and they spent the morning out

together in the garden. Jeannette, who lingered uneasily about, met them several times. The cheek of Lilian was not more blooming than that of Adèle; her eyes laughed with enjoyment; she looked gay and happy. "Because he is away," thought Jeannette, not pleased with the change.

She was meditating over it that same evening, sitting alone in her favourite room, when Jean made his appearance.

"Mademoiselle Jeannette," he said, "will you go and try and comfort Madame a little? She is sitting alone in the Hall, white as death, and looking so wretched! It made my heart ache to see the tender little thing fretting thus for her husband. It is very natural, you know."

"Oh! what fools men are!" internally muttered Jeannette. "Fretting for her husband, of course! pray what took him away at this time, when she should not have a moment to breathe like? He is mad; they are all mad and blind. Blind! Ay, a mole has sharper eyes than a man."

Nevertheless she rose, left her wheel, went to the Hall, opened the door, and looking in asked if Madame wanted her.

Adèle sat on a low chair, leaning back doing nothing, looking at the fire listlessly, like one whose soul and being Apathy has invaded. Without turning round, or moving ever so slightly, she replied:

"I want nothing, Jeannette, thank you."

"Fretting for her husband or because she has a husband," thought Jeannette, closing the door.

She had risen brave and resolute in the morning,

determined to battle with the foe, for she had a strong though childish heart, and not to be conquered without a struggle ; but already the reaction had come, already defeat had overtaken her. A little while she had forgotten her bitter lot ; for a few hours she had been a child, a girl again ; but, with the absence of Lilian, now fast asleep upstairs, with the solitude of the old Hall, memory had returned, and with memory misery. It is good for us all to suffer ; that distasteful medicine works well : it is indeed the salt of the earth, the bitter brine in which humanity must needs be steeped to live. But it is very hard to bear. Adèle sank under the burden. The whole of the next day she surrendered herself to repining unspoken but deep. Like Job, she lamented over herself and her lot, and pined, "that she might rest, until her wished-for day should come, as that of the hireling."

Anxiously, though silently, Jeannette watched her mistress, and saw her growing sadder as the day wore, from which Jean perceived that Madame's fretting increased with Monsieur's absence. Jeannette turned up her eyes and muttered audibly :

"Oh ! what fools men are."

Hein !" echoed Jean, surprised.

"I say," resumed Jeannette, stoutly, "that men are fools."

Jean, who was standing by the open door of her little room—it was a well understood rule that he was neither to sit down nor to come too near—indeed, he had only called in to make a polite inquiry concerning the state of Mademoiselle Jeannette's

health—Jean, we say, gave the lady of his thoughts a doubtful look ; as much as to say, “ Is that for me, or how am I to take it ? ”

“ Why did he not stay at home, or take her with him ? ” asked Jeannette.

“ Because of the weather, I suppose,” answered Jean.

“ He did not do it becuse men are fools,” resolutely interrupted Jeannette, “ because—” she proceeded no further ; a sound of carriage-wheels stopping at the gate of the Manor gave another current to her thoughts. She started up and clasped her hands.

“ Thank God, he is come back,” she said, and almost upsetting her wheel in her eagerness, she hurried out of the room, before Jean well knew what she was about.

“ What a flighty thing she always has been ! ” he said half audibly, “ and will be to the end of time,” he continued, leaving the room with leisurely step to go and wait his master’s orders.

But it was not Mr. Osborne. No male voice had greeted Jeannette’s ear when she opened the door. To her surprise and her dismay too, Mrs. Osborne and her two daughters had alighted from a travelling-carriage, and entered the Manor. They came, too, not for a day, but with an unmistakeable array of trunks and luggage, that intimated in plain speech, “ We are here for the winter.”

“ Oh ! my poor little mistress ! ” thought Jeannette, “ my poor darling, your troubles are only beginning.”

But Jeannette had, as she said herself, the spirit of a lion, and at once she put on a brave front and met the enemy. She threw open the door of the old Hall, and in a clear voice announced—

“Madame and Mesdemoiselles Osborne.”

But, though a bright fire burned on the hearth, though the lamp stood lit on the table, the chair of Adèle was vacant; the Hall was empty. To that chair Anna at once found her way and she sank down in it without further troubling herself about the present. Isabella walked up to the fire, and slightly shivering warmed her hands; with a wearied air, Mrs. Osborne unfastened her cloak, and looking over her shoulder, she said to Jeannette, who stood waiting in the background:

“Where is Monsieur?”

“Monsieur is not at home.”

“Has he long been gone?”

But before Jeannette could answer the question, Isabella, taking up a half embroidered handkerchief from the chimney, had sharply asked,—

“Whose work is that?”

Jeannette dilated with triumph. A wicked light shone in her brown eye, still clear and bright like that of a bird, her lip took a sarcastic curl, and in the meekest of meek voices she demurely answered,—

“It is the work of Madame.”

A deep, an awful stillness filled the room. Anna opened her eyes amazed, Isabella drew herself up indignantly; the calm, dispassionate Mrs. Osborne bit her lip and forced an unnatural smile; then a

significant look went round ; Mr. Osborne was married.

Jeannette enjoyed it for awhile, then said,—

“ I shall go and tell Madame that you are come.”

She got no answer, and withdrew. The door closed upon her, yet the storm did not break forth at once. Mrs. Osborne began. She raised her handkerchief to her eyes, and sighed.

“ I did not think my son William would have chosen this moment, when the whole of his helpless and innocent family are on the brink of ruin, to take a wife.”

“ So selfish of him,” moaned Anna, shutting her eyes ; “ what could make him do it ?”

“ Love,” said Isabella, sneering. “ What a pretty pattern,” she added, looking over the handkerchief ; “ I suppose he drew it for her.”

“ I hope it is not that girl,” said Anna, crossly ; “ I shall hate her, you know.”

“ Whoever she may be,” again sighed Mrs. Osborne, but this time withdrawing her handkerchief, “ we must forget our personal feelings, to remember that she is William’s wife, my daughter, and your sister.”

“ I shall detest her—I detest her already,” cried Anna, with something like energy ; “ I do not like William, he is selfish and bad-tempered ; why should I like his wife ?”

“ Anna, you amaze me !” said Mrs. Osborne, virtuously ; “ do you call yourself a Christian, with such feelings in your heart ?”

But before Anna could answer this delicate question, Mrs. Osborne had turned sharply on her elder daughter, and in a voice tremulous with emotion, she had asked what she meant by uttering the vulgar and insolent word of humbug?

"Because it is humbug, there!" recklessly exclaimed Isabella; "I declare I can stand it no longer, it makes me sick. You know you are mad that William is married; you know you dislike that girl more than Anna does; you know it exasperates you to find a little thing who can rule you and us like so many children; tell us when we are to dine, whom we are to see, and how much we are to spend, too; you know you hate it, and so do I, so far as that goes, and yet you go on talking about daughters, and sisters, and Christian feelings. I say again it is humbug, and that I hate humbug."

Mrs. Osborne never lost her temper, but then the fair Isabella had never spoken so plainly before; and Mrs. Osborne's equanimity, already sorely disturbed at finding a wife, that most potent of domestic rulers, established and seated in her little throne of household authority, could not resist the mixture of frankness and insolence that characterized her daughter's speech. Pale and wrathful, and with kindling eyes and white lips, she turned on and walked up to Isabella, who waited boldly. But no domestic scene, no angry quarrel, was to divide the little band already conjured against the unknown enemy.

Mrs. Osborne's brow cleared; her blue eye softened; the smile returned to her lip; the calm, lady-

like grace to her bearing. She had heard a light step without; the rustling of a silk robe had reached her quick ear. Amiable, sweet as honey, maternal, and dignified, breathing welcome, she turned towards the door as it opened and admitted Mr. Osborne's wife.

In all haste Jeannette had run up to the room of Adèle, but Adèle was not there, and Madame Leroy knew nothing of her mistress. She said as much with an air that implied that it was her business to dress Madame Osborne, and not to be acquainted with her movements.

"That woman is almost as great a fool as if she were a man," muttered Jeannette, impatiently. "Surely," she added, looking out on the dark night, "she cannot be out at this hour." But it was not impossible; and spite the cold, Jeannette ventured out in the garden, and unceremoniously called out—

"Madame, you are wanted."

But Adèle did not answer. Where could she be? Jeannette was revolving the question in her mind, when a light in Mr. Osborne's study caught her eye; at once she guessed the truth; Adèle was there. She went up the flight of stone steps, and through the closed glass door she saw her mistress. Adèle sat in her husband's chair; her head lay on his table still covered with papers, and her arms were folded above it. Twice Jeannette knocked before her mistress looked up, and when she did do so, the old woman saw that her face was bathed in tears; but she did not seem conscious of them. In a calm voice she said—

"Come in, Jeannette ;" and as calmly, when Jeannette had entered, she asked—"What is it?—what do you want?"

"Ah, Madame, you are crying !"

"Ay, Jeannette, and I shall cry more until he comes back. Would you believe it?—I never asked where he was going. I do not know it; no one knows it. I have been to ask Monsieur Morel in the counting-house, and he does not know it. Oh, I shall be wretched until I see him again."

"Well, Madame, take an old woman's advice; be strong and courageous; for I am come to tell you."

Adèle sprang towards her, ashy pale.

"Is he dead?" she asked.

"God bless us, no! Monsieur is well, I hope."

"But something has happened to him," cried Adèle; "what is it? tell me—tell me!"

"On my word, Madame, I know nothing good or bad of Monsieur."

The colour of Adèle returned; but she bit her lip, and looked half angry.

"There never was anything like it," she exclaimed. "There is that Monsieur Morel, who keeps moaning over to me that my husband leaves his pistols at home, that the roads are not safe, until I feel that I should like to dip *him* in the lake! And then you must needs come, bearing evil tidings in your very looks, to make me lose my temper, just when I have resolved to be an angel of meekness by the time he comes back. You are all very tiresome. I want to be good, and you will not let me."

She spoke rather petulantly for a would-be angel ; but, without heeding this, Jeannette resumed :

“ Be courageous, Madame ; Madame Osborne and her two daughters are come.”

“ With him ?”

“ No, Madame, alone. Ah ! be strong and firm ; young as you are, you are the mistress of the house, Monsieur’s wife—do not from mere goodness, do not let yourself be trampled upon. They will be three against you, and he is away ; but if you will only be firm and strong, all will be well ; and if you let yourself be trampled upon all will be undone. They will take everything from you—they will begin with the keys of the cupboard, and they will end with Monsieur.”

Adèle laughed until her eyes sparkled.

“ I defy them,” she said, gaily ; “ the keys are here,” she added, jingling them in her right-hand apron pocket ; “ and Monsieur is there,” she continued, touching the wedding-ring on her left hand.

“ Ay, Madame, I know that, but do not let yourself be trampled upon. I know what mothers and sisters are to step-daughters and sisters-in-law.”

“ Hush ! Jeannette !” interrupted Adèle, firmly, but good-humouredly, “ you are dreaming. There will be no trampling and no resisting, and all I have to do now, is to go and bid them welcome.”

“ Time will show,” muttered Jeannette, turning up her eyes ; “ time will show !” But, without heeding her, Adèle gave her a few rapid orders, and left the room.

Yet her heart beat a little as she approached the door of the Hall; she opened it boldly, then half-shyly paused on the threshold, and the pause gave the three ladies time to recognize her. Ay, it was Adèle. The light of the lamp fell on her flushed face, the gloom of the staircase behind as she stood with the half-open door still in her hand, gave double vividness to the distinct outlines of her young and graceful figure. Her hair was bound in the fashion of the day, with three velvet bands, blue to suit the silk dress of the same colour, dark enough for the season, and light enough to show at night, which fell around her in rich and ample folds. A little black silk apron, gaily embroidered in flowers of every hue, gave it a careless household grace. Jewels or ornaments she wore none, save a light gold chain that glittered around her neck, and fell down to her waist, but her collar and lace sleeves were thin and delicate as a cobweb, and, as in her half-bending forward attitude, her little foot peeped out from underneath the edge of her dress, feminine eyes could plainly see that her velvet slipper was trimmed with fur, and what fur, good heavens! sable, real sable.

“He is mad!” indignantly thought Isabella, measuring Mr. Osborne’s love from his generosity. And she detested Adèle from that moment. He was her brother, and she could not have him; but what right had another woman to take him away?

Adèle came forward. She looked at Anna, who did not leave her chair, at Isabella, who seemed to have grown into the marble of the mantelpiece, and

she saw but one friendly face, that of her handsome mother-in-law, who graciously came towards her, laid her hand on hers, and bending kissed her cheek.

"My dear child," she said, "do not wonder at a little surprise. We did not know that William had given me a daughter and my children a sister. I wish you joy, with all my heart; but I shall scold William."

Adèle looked up and smiled. "Monsieur Osborne is so forgetful," she said.

"But there are things that should not be forgotten," persisted Mrs. Osborne, with a little dignity.

"He is so forgetful!" said Adèle, again; "he never thought of telling me you were coming, and thus you will, I am afraid, find this first evening rather uncomfortable; but I shall do my best. I have already ordered fires in all your rooms, and dinner will come up presently. Would you like to rest first?—shall Madame Leroy help you to unpack? you have had bad weather?—how tired you must be!"

She spoke with a quiet ease, that made Mrs. Osborne drop the dignified at once. But with alarm, that careful lady saw that her two daughters had preserved their rigid attitude. In vain she coughed and looked. Adèle was ignored.

"Oh! we are indeed dreadfully tired," she said; "the most awful weather, bad horses; it was dreadful. And I think that we will, if you will allow it, retire for a while. Anna, my dear, Isabella, my love, are you coming?"

But it did not suit those two young ladies to obey. Anna crossly replied that she did not like cold rooms, and Isabella, triumphantly surveying her blooming beauty in the glass, said she was never tired.

"They are a pair of incorrigible fools," thought Mrs. Osborne, with some contempt. "*I* should be mad, truly, to sacrifice myself for them."

William's wife was the side of strength, and to that side Mrs. Osborne would adhere. With an increase of tenderness, she pressed her daughter-in-law's hand, and confidentially whispering that she was sinking with fatigue, she left the room. Adèle remained alone with her two sisters-in-law. She thought them cold and strange; but they were her husband's sisters, and she felt friendly towards them. She approached the fireplace, and looking up at Isabella, she said simply:

"I am glad to see you," and she held out her hand.

Coldly and ungraciously Isabella held out hers; but not one word did she speak.

"I hope she will not attempt to shake hands with me!" moaned Anna, with a shudder; "it would make my flesh creep, you know."

She spoke in English; Adèle did not understand the words, but she heard the moan, she saw the shiver. "Ah! poor thing," she thought, "how ill she is!" And going up to her with sudden interest, she softly asked how she felt.

"So cold!" moaned Anna.

"You are not covered enough," promptly and decisively said Adèle.

"Of course not,—I said so; but they are so selfish."

Adèle tapped her forehead, and was struck with a brilliant thought.

"Wait awhile," she said, "wait awhile;" and she darted out of the room.

"What a ridiculous little thing it is," said Isabella, with a scornful smile.

"I do not think she is so very ridiculous," shortly said Anna; "she saw I was cold, as any one could see it, and she is gone to fetch something to keep me warm."

"I wish you joy of your sister-in-law," cried Isabella, with a sneer, "and I leave her to you, and you to her. It would make me sick."

And with a sweep of her robes Isabella walked out. She was scarcely gone when Adèle appeared, bearing a rich fur cape, which Madame de Brieuve had put into the corbeille. She opened it, and holding it up for Anna's gaze, asked if that would keep her warm. Anna thought it would.

"But you will want it back again," she said, a little crossly. About its value she did not care a pin, but it looked comfortable, and Anna gave it a longing eye.

"I shall only be too well pleased if you will keep it," promptly said Adèle; "let me put it on you."

Anna offered no resistance; the fur cape seemed to have been made for her, it sat so well. She sunk back in her chair, and already felt warmer.

"I am so glad," said Adèle, "but what have you got under your feet?—Nothing—here is my stool."

Anna condescended to accept it, and with the free warm zeal of youth, Adèle placed the stool under her feet. Anna looked down at her. Adèle was kneeling on the rug before her, and she looked up in her sister-in-law's face with a look so clear, a smile so friendly, and a whole aspect so blooming and gay, that Anna, already much mollified, was thoroughly won. For the first time she found one who really believed that she was cold, and who acted on the belief.

"I like you," she said; "and I am glad William has married you. I am sure you will make me comfortable."

"Oh, yes, I will," cried Adèle, eagerly; "only tell me what I am to do."

"I must be kept very warm," said Anna, "and comfortable, and I must be attended to."

"Will you have my maid, Madame Leroy?"

Anna thought she would not mind, but intimated pretty clearly that Madame Leroy must be like the fur cape, a long loan. Adèle gaily replied that it should be as she wished, and finished her conquest by discovering that Anna's chair was too far away from the fire, and wheeling it a little nearer.

"I like that chair; whose is it?" asked Anna.

"Yours," promptly replied Adèle.

"I feel very comfortable," murmured Anna, closing her eyes.

"I am so glad!" exclaimed Adèle, delighted.

The door opened, and Mrs. Osborne entered. She heard the friendly words uttered in the friendly tone. She saw Anna in the fur cape and Adèle

standing by her. At once the clear-sighted lady also saw which way to steer for the present. She went up to Anna's chair, and leaning over it, she looked across at Adèle, and gently and sadly shook her head.

"She is so delicate," she said, "I live in fear."

Adèle nodded sagaciously; then inclining her head towards her right shoulder, she looked thoughtful and compassionate. Isabella, who had followed her mother in, closed the door, and gave the three a haughty, disdainful look.

"How deceitful they all three are," she thought, with curling lip; "they hate and they fondle. I alone am true; I hate, and I show it. How I detest women and their ways. Why am I not a man?"

Poor Isabella! little she knew that she was more woman in her faults, less man in her virtues, than any of the three at whom she looked with such sweeping scorn. Mrs. Osborne was dispassionate; Anna had never made herself uncomfortable with envy of another woman's beauty; Adèle was generous as a princess. And truth compels us to declare that number one was, and had ever been, the first object of the fair Isabella's thoughts; her prejudices, too, were like her passions, blind and strong, and, would we need not add it, Isabella hated a pretty woman.

CHAPTER X.

MR OSBORNE'S FAMILY.

THE wind was keen, and Miss Osborne walked briskly down the garden. She gathered up her ample skirts as she stepped along, for it had been raining; and Isabella Osborne, though reckless of many things, was not unfemininely reckless of earth-stained garments; but she looked neither right nor left; she walked on, indeed, like one who had an object.

An object she certainly had. She reached the end of the garden; she opened the door that led to the counting-house, crossed an iron bridge that now spanned the stream, and she had entered the office before Monsieur Morel, who had seen her stepping like a nymph from beneath the low garden door, had had time to wonder where Mademoiselle Isabella could be going on that bleak day at that late hour. She now stood before him in all her stately beauty.

Miss Osborne had freaks. Sometimes she was a mediæval lady; she then wore her hair in low bands,

had a robe of extraordinary make, and displayed a morocco pouch and a massive chatelaine in its folds. Sometimes she appeared in ample skirts all but hooped, with low bodies, wasp-like waists, and frizzed hair. On this day she was in the Diana Vernon mood ; her dark cloth dress was made like a riding-habit, tight-fitting and buttoned up ; her hair was parted on one side like a man's, and in her hand she held a long, slender wand, which she had found in the garden ; and being a fine woman, and a handsome girl, she looked very well.

But the effect her looks might produce was for once Isabella's least thought. She gave a rapid look round the room ; it was a dull and dingy place ; the blank glass windows, the strongly-bound and brass clasped books on their shelves, the spare, bending figure of the sallow foreman at his desk, made her proud and handsome lip curl. Business was a fine thing, for it gave money ; but how could money, the creator of luxury and ease, come out of a place like this ?

Monsieur Morel looked round, and rose very slowly, without much deference or *empressement*. It was his habit to stoop low enough out of the counting-house, but in it he felt strong and cool. The beautiful Isabella wanted him, or she had not come ; and if she wanted him, why it was well to keep his advantage.

"You have got a letter of mine?" she said, briefly.

Monsieur Morel shook his head slowly.

"Monsieur has not written since his departure,"

he said; "Madame came again this morning, but I had the grief—"

"That is not it," interrupted Isabella, "you have my letter—I want it."

"I have no letter belonging to Mademoiselle," was the grave reply.

She gave him a keen look.

"None directed to you, for instance, and meant for me?"

"None," he answered, slowly. "I once had such a letter from an eminent commercial man, intended for a lady, and directed to me—a lady who had business with him; but I perceived the mistake, and at once returned it half read."

"To the lady?"

"To the gentleman. It was an offer of marriage, I believe; but I did not see the end."

Morel took up his pen as if he regretted losing so much time; but Isabella did not move; she looked at him fixedly; her cheek was flushed; her eye was sparkling.

"He wanted to marry Mademoiselle de Janson," she said, with a forced laugh.

Monsieur Morel smiled, but did not answer.

"Or my sister-in-law," she pursued, reckless of what she said.

"Or any other lady," replied Monsieur Morel, "for all I know." But he spoke like one who did know, and would not tell.

It might be all an invention; but Isabella received it with avidity. Even as whatever dress she might wear, she was always the same violent, truthful, im-

pulsive, and selfish girl of the nineteenth century ; so, spite of experience, with her eyes open, with contempt for every one's judgment save her own, Isabella was ever falling into some new trap, never taught and never cured.

"It does not matter much," she said, recovering a little ; "I thought you had a letter of mine, and you have not ; there is an end of it."

She walked out without deigning him another look, and did not condescend to shut the door behind her.

"Now, why should I not do as well as another man for her husband?" thought Monsieur Morel, watching her stately figure as she re-entered the garden. "She is handsomer than that little midge who is fretting herself pale for her husband, and is more haughty in her civility than this one in her rudeness. If she is not rich, she brings wealth in the skirt of her dress and the sole of her shoe ; it clings to her. I feel, too, I have a natural liking for handsome, well-born, well-bred, well-dowered young ladies. They would laugh if they knew it. Many a one laughed at the great Napoleon, and bit her nails later, thinking—'I might have been an Empress.' As for that Baron, let him marry her if he dare. I forbid the banns!"

He resumed his writing. Isabella, too, indulged in soliloquy as she walked back through the garden. A half incredulous revulsion had come to her.

"So he wanted her," she thought ; "he marry a penniless girl—never ! The man (viz. M. F. Morel)

is an idiot! William, indeed, can marry for love, but Auguste is made of other stuff."

Yet she re-entered the Hall in anything but a good temper. A family circle was gathered there; Mrs. Osborne was writing at the table, Anna was sleeping by the fire, Adèle sat on a low stool embroidering, and Lilian was playing on the floor by her side. The little girl looked up on hearing the door open; at once she mimicked the frown and ill-tempered look of her aunt; then she laughed saucily. Lilian was a spoiled child, used to her own way; she had, moreover, taken a singular dislike to her father's relatives: she received Mrs. Osborne's sweetness—for Lilian was a great heiress, as that prudent lady knew—with open impertinence, openly she laughed at Anna, and openly she detested her aunt Isabella, who had begun their acquaintance by calling her an ugly little monkey.

"Truly you rear William's child admirably," irefully, said Isabella, perceiving the face Lilian had put on, and addressing Adèle.

"Oh, Lilian!" said Adèle, gently holding up her fore-finger; but Lilian laughed, and threw her arms around the neck of Adèle, who had not the heart to chide. Her absent husband seemed to be looking up at her from the face of his child. "Why are you so like him, if you will not be good like him?" she asked, tenderly.

Lilian kissed her, but expressed no penitence. She had already learned that Adèle belonged to her as well as to Mr. Osborne, that she might do as she pleased with her father's young wife. Unchecked,

she now persisted in her caresses. Mrs. Osborne looked up from her letters with a smile, that meant, "How charming." Isabella, who stood by the window, looked disdainful. Everything annoyed and irritated her. She had written to the Baron to come, and he had not answered, and was not coming. Worse still, M. Morel had hinted at things she hated to think of.

"I wonder William does not write to you," she said sharply.

Adèle put Lilian away ; she turned red and pale, her lip trembled.

"I hope he is not ill," she said.

"Ill ! not he ; he is simply the most careless fellow. He might be more attentive, though, considering the honeymoon is barely over."

Lilian had resumed her play ; Adèle leaned her cheek on her hand, and fell into a dreary dream. Mr. Osborne had been gone a week. Why did he not write or come back ? Oh ! for the sound of his step on the stairs ; for his friendly look and his friendly voice in that wide room where, save for his child playing near her, she would have felt so lonely.

The Baron had proved the pledge of a new alliance between Isabella and her mother. A few conversations with Adèle had convinced the sagacious lady that though she might be a fondly loved bride, yet she knew nothing of her husband's affairs, and the daughter-in-law had been at once sacrificed to the daughter. She was civil to Mr. Osborne's wife, of course, but why lose time and diplomacy with one

who could not serve, and who seemed too good-natured to injure her? It would have been foolish, and unlike Charles the Second,—

“Who never said a foolish thing,
And never did a wise one.”

Mrs. Osborne did not mind how many foolish speeches she made, provided she acted wisely. She now looked up from her letter, saw that Lilian had left the room, and quite sweetly and in the English tongue, for it was not necessary that Adèle should understand, she addressed her daughter, who still stood near the window with a frown on her fair brow.

“Isabella, my love, is he coming?”

“How can I tell?” was the cross reply.

“I do so want him to come, I want to explain to him about the partnership before the arrival of W.—you know whom I mean.”

“William, I suppose,” perversely put in Isabella.

“My dear, why mention her husband’s name? Well, W. is peculiar, and I doubt if our friend knows how to manage those peculiarities.”

“I hope he would scorn to flatter William.”

“My love, that is not it. We must manage W. or we can effect nothing. We must persuade him, or he will allow the old house to fall, and the high position you are entitled to will escape you once more. I thought A. might help us, but I suppose it was only a man’s fancy for a pretty face—he tells her nothing.

"Do you think her so very pretty?" asked Isabella, half turning from the window to look down at Adèle.

"My dearest, do not look at her so. Your imprudent frankness will ruin everything. She is pretty, but she has no hold on W. His silence, his not writing, prove it. He is just the man to like a woman for a week, and be sick of her for a lifetime."

She paused? Isabella had burst out laughing, and Adèle had risen, pale, but cool.

"Madame," said she, addressing her mother-in-law, "I understand English a little. I need say no more. I am sure you are too well-bred a lady to utter again in my presence remarks you cannot wish me to hear."

She spoke calmly, sat down again, and resumed her work, as if nothing had happened. Isabella laughed till the tears ran down her cheek, not at Adèle, who was quite calm and self-possessed, but at Mrs. Osborne, who for once in her life at least looked disconcerted.

"I declare, Adèle, I shall like you," said Isabella, turning to her little sister-in-law; "I had no idea you had so much spirit. I thought you were tame, and I hate tame men or women."

Adèle looked up at her from her stool.

"How odd you are, Isabella," she said, smiling.

"Odd! how so?" asked Isabella, who instinctively felt a coming attack.

"You talk, look, and speak, as if I were a little girl."

“And pray, what are you?” asked Isabella, looking down from her full height, as the French say, at the diminutive figure of Adèle, that looked lower and slighter on her low stool.

“The mistress of the house,” she said, coolly; and she gave Isabella a little side nod of her young head perfectly good-humoured, but perfectly conscious.

Isabella bit her lip and reddened.

Mrs. Osborne, quite recovered by this, smiled pleasantly.

“Quite right, my dear,” she said, approvingly; “Isabella is a rude, naughty girl, who must be put in her place.”

“Oh! I am not angry with her, not at all,” kindly said Adèle.

“Quite right,” observed Mrs. Osborne, more approvingly than before, “nor with me either, I am sure. I can rely on your good sense for that; so no more about it. And all this reminds me that I have a favour to ask of the little mistress of the house. We expect an old friend of ours to call in to-day. I confess I should like to ask him to stay to dinner.”

“Then pray do,” answered Adèle, very graciously.

“He is not merely an old friend of ours; he is a neighbour of yours: I allude—but here he is.”

She rose, as the door was thrown open, and Jean, with emphatic dignity, announced—

“Monsieur le Baron.”

And blooming, gay, handsome and good-humoured as ever, the Baron entered, with a bow.

Mrs. Osborne went up to him, with gay reproachful grace.

“Truant!” she exclaimed, “what have you been doing all this age?”

“Longing to see Courcelles again!” said Monsieur de Launay, who dealt more than good taste allows, in pretty speeches. He kissed her hand, and went up to Isabella. She stood waiting, with the air of a queen; they met as potentates meet. Isabella bent her stately head. Monsieur de Launay’s hand was laid on his heart.

“It is some time since we have met,” she said, briefly.

“An eternity!” he answered in a low tone.

He looked up, like one imploring grace; she smiled down like one giving mercy; but no more was said. Anna, who had wakened on the entrance of the Baron, looked at him very crossly, and still more crossly replied, in answer to his polite inquiry concerning her health, that she was well when she could be quiet, a speech Monsieur de Launay understood in its general sense, as indicating the love of repose, and the happiness of a retired life, and which he did not dream of applying to his entrance.

“Repose is to the mind—” he began, but a rustling robe by him made him turn from Anna on his left, who looked as sour as vinegar, to the lady who stood on his right. He looked down and saw Adèle. Her eyes gazed up in his face, calm and serene; with childish dignity she held out her hand; in a sweet, clear voice, she said:

“I am glad to see you.”

What ailed the gay, the self-possessed Monsieur de Launay? He looked at Adèle; he turned red and pale, at length he took her hand and faltered a few low words, which did not reach her ear. Adèle gave him a look of quiet surprise, then walked away to one of the windows and looked out on the wintry landscape. Isabella stared at the Baron, who smiled faintly and said the room was hot.

“If I ever become that man’s wife, how I shall hate him!” thought Isabella, indignantly.

A storm was brooding; Mrs. Osborne hastened to interfere. What cold, bleak weather it was—how dissatisfied the labouring classes seemed—did he really apprehend another revolution. Thus far Adèle had vaguely listened, but she heard no more; her thoughts had wandered away in a dream.

“Why does he not write?” she thought. “Oh! how long, how very long he has been away! What an endless week since he left, and they came. They dislike me, and I cannot like them—save Anna, a little. Ah! how changed my once happy, careless life is now! I was so happy—so thoughtless—no one said bitter things of me—for I was nothing;—who could envy the poorest and most insignificant of little girls! And now! Oh! my friend, my only friend, you who would shelter me from every evil, guard me against every unkindness, why are you not here? I have half hated, like an ingrate as I was, being so often near you with your kind arm around me, but now, oh! how I long for that refuge—my true friend, my best friend, come back—come quickly.”

Her heart swelled, her eyes overflowed. In vain she shook her head, her tears only came faster, and blinded her. Suddenly they ceased; she had heard the distant tramp of a horse; it was, it must be the step of Joli. Intently she looked. Layers of massive grey rocks rose like bastions above the road; it sank down by them, and vanished in the gloom of their deep shadow, made deeper by hanging trees. From that invisible hollow rose up the sound, but rider she as yet saw none. At length, above the sweep of foreground, appeared steed and horseman: it was he; it was Mr. Osborne; it was her husband. Adèle uttered a low cry, and darted out of the room.

The Baron gave a start.

"What ails Mademoiselle de Courcelles?" he exclaimed, uneasily.

"Mademoiselle de Courcelles!" slowly repeated Isabella; "did you not read the whole of my letter? did you not turn the page?" she impatiently added; "and do me the honour of looking at the post-scriptum."

"I was not aware," began the Baron, with some confusion—he abruptly ceased, and rose; from where he sat, his eye could command and survey the road: and some vision there seemed to have petrified him. At once Isabella was by his side. She saw nothing, save Adèle in the arms of her husband; pale, wrathful, and with silent anger in her eyes, she turned on Monsieur de Launay. "And what is that to you?" her whole aspect seemed to say.

The Baron struck his forehead, and looked confounded.

“Good God ! they are married !” was all he said.

“Well, sir !” exclaimed Isabella, with quivering lips, “well, sir, what if they are ?”

“Ah, Madame !” exclaimed Monsieur de Launay, “can you not understand my feelings ? Such a breach of *convenance*, of etiquette, towards a lady, that lady too the mistress of the house, I have never been guilty of before.”

He spoke with the tone and the look of a man of the world, shocked and distressed at having violated one of those polite laws which Tyrant Custom imposes on its slaves.

“What will Madame Osborne think of me ?” he pursued ; “I must trust to her goodness.”

“She will think nothing,” interrupted Isabella ; “do you not see how pale and altered she is with fretting for William’s absence ? He is come back, and in that joy all your sins will be forgotten.”

The Baron breathed relieved and smiled.

“Your goodness restores me to life,” he said.

In vain Isabella looked at him ; his composed manner, his unmoved countenance, betrayed no deeper emotion than that of a well-bred man to whom a breach of good breeding, howsoever slight and unintentional, is matter of grave import and serious regret.

CHAPTER XI.

THE CHANGE.

MR. OSBORNE had alighted; Jean was leading away the horse of his master; and Adèle was laughing and crying for joy in the arms of her husband. He stood on the lowest step of the flight that led to the Manor, looking down at her, whilst she, standing on the step above, was still obliged to look up. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes were dim, but her lips were smiling.

“Oh, I have been so unhappy!” she said, “I thought something had happened to you. I was wretched when the wind blew—wretched when it was still: but all is well now, all is well; my friend is come back.”

Eager, warm, and cordial was her welcome; he could not, and did not, doubt its sincerity. She was glad to see him back. It was plain he need not have the irritating and tormenting thought that she had looked with terror to his return; that their meeting would be to her an infliction; so far he could not murmur; and if, spite of this, his look remained sad,

if his welcome, spite her ardour, remained cold, it was because he could not forget : because the words he had heard, the face he had seen, had engraven themselves on his brain ; they had become a part of his being, and could leave it no more.

“ You look well,” he said ; “ how is Lilian ?”

“ Lilian is well, and I am happy. Oh, how I have longed for you to come back !”

“ Have you, Adèle ?” he said, and he smiled rather oddly ; yet he did not disbelieve her.

“ They are here,” she continued, “ your sisters and Madame Osborne.”

He bit his lip, and looked anything but pleased.

“ I have done all I could to make them comfortable,” she pursued, “ and if I have not succeeded, you will excuse it, will you not ?”

“ What has brought them here ?” he asked, sharply ; “ they were well in Paris ; what have they in view ?”

He spoke with stern bitterness. Adèle looked a little frightened.

“ Oh, pray meet them kindly,” she said, seeking his hand, and pressing it with a sort of entreaty, “ pray meet them kindly.”

He did not seem to heed or hear her, but asked in a peculiar tone—

“ Has Monsieur de Launay been here ?”

“ He is here now.”

“ Of course.” He entered, closed the outer door, and opening the door of the Hall, motioned his wife to pass in first ; but Adèle drew back with a sagacious nod, and with the smiling intimation that she

had orders to give to Jeannette, she vanished down the staircase.

She met Jeannette half way.

"Dinner at once," cried Adèle, gaily; "Monsieur is come back, and a fire in his study, too; it is cold, and he may have letters to write. Well, Jeannette, why do you stand and look at me?" she impatiently added, for her old friend did not move.

"Oh, Madame," moaned Jeannette, "now is the time! Do not let them get hold of Monsieur! They have made you thinner and paler—do not let them take him from you and kill you quite."

Adèle looked as if it required all her love for the woman who had reared her, and all her pity for that woman's evident distress, not to lose her temper on hearing this speech.

"Take him away from me," she said, at length, in a low, passionate voice, whilst her cheek flushed and her eyes lit; "take him away from me, my husband and my only friend! Jeannette, he is mine, and I have bought him at such a price, that I will die before I lose him. But what am I saying?—I am as mad as you are. Why, he would see a whole legion of stepmothers and sisters perish before my little finger were hurt. Go, old Jeannette," she added, laying her hand on the old woman's shoulder, for she stood above her at the head of the staircase; "go, you have a naughty little mistress who never can or will deserve the good man she has got; but such as she is, remember, once for all, Jeannette, that she is a loved wife, and that she knows it. And now gather your wits, and mind what I said

about the dinner and the fire in your master's study."

She nodded gaily and turned away, without waiting for a reply, and meeting Lilian who was coming down the staircase step by step, she caught her in her arms, and kissing her, she cried, in the joy of her heart,—

"Be glad,—be very glad, Lilian,—our friend is come back."

"Aunt Isabella will not call me an ugly little monkey opposite papa, will she?" triumphantly asked Lilian.

Adèle coloured and laughed consciously; for though she did not say so, she, too, thought; "and Madame Osborne will not dare to think now that it was a man's fancy for a pretty face; oh, no, she will not!"

Lilian was one of those provokingly acute little girls—for boys have all the dulness of their sex in such matters—from whom concealment is impossible. Did she guess, as Adèle still held her in her arms, what was passing in her heart, that she looked with such mischievous glee in her young stepmother's eyes? Her look, if it meant anything, certainly meant, "Oh, yes, all is right now, the defender is come." Adèle put the child down, and kissed her again, Lilian returned the embrace; an alliance offensive and defensive was sealed between them from that hour.

They entered the Hall hand in hand; Monsieur De Launay was in the act of leaving. He bowed and in a low tone delivered a congratulation and an

apology. Adèle gave him a surprised look. Isabella had said it truly; she was not conscious of his offence. He returned the look with one in which something of reproach blended with surprise, bowed once more around, and was gone.

“How well the Baron looks,” said Mrs. Osborne; “as well as ever.”

“Ay, truly,” said Mr. Osborne, and not a whit less pleased with himself. “Well, Lilian, how are you, child?”

He sank down on a couch with a wearied air, and took up his little girl on his knee, but he did not much heed her childish talk. Adèle had drawn her stool near him; she had sat on it, and was looking up in his pale, haggard face with wistful attention, and spite of himself his look sought hers, spite of himself his look became kind, and his hand rested with involuntary affection on the dark and glossy head of his little wife. Adèle, half ashamed and half happy, laid her head on his knee.

“The dear child has been so unhappy without you,” said Mrs. Osborne.

Adèle reddened and raised her head; Mr. Osborne withdrew his hand.

“She thought herself quite forsaken,” put in Isabella, leaning back in her chair, and thence ironically surveying her brother and his wife. Adèle smiled and said quietly:

“Not I; I only asked why he did not write.”

“I could not write,” said Mr. Osborne.

“And where were you?” asked Isabella; “too far away, I suppose.”

“No, I was near enough.”

“Then you deserve a good scolding from your wife; but no, she only gives you a tender gaze. Ah, well, when I have a husband——”

But the door opened, Jean entered, dinner was waiting in a neighbouring apartment now destined to that use.

“Why you are not going to dine with us?” crossly said Isabella, as she saw Lilian take hold of the skirts of Adèle.

“No, Lilian, you must not,” said Mr. Osborne; “I object.” He paused and smiled as he met his wife’s entreating look, and merely saying, “you will spoil her,” he yielded.

But for Isabella the meal would have been silent. Mr. Osborne had a sort of indulgent liking for his sister Isabella; all he saw in her remarks was the petulance of a spoiled beauty. Did Adèle see more in them that she seemed unable to touch the food on her plate, unable to do anything save to look at her husband, opposite whom she sat? For spite the remonstrative looks of Mr. Osborne, spite the cross inquiry of Anna, who asked to know why people could not eat their dinner without other people making all that noise, Isabella rattled on about husbands who neglected their wives, and wives who mourned for their husbands, until Mr. Osborne, near whom she sat, turned towards her, and gently patting her cheek, asked with kind irony,—

“Isabella, is not this rather in bad taste?”

Isabella reddened violently, and laughed a forced laugh; but she did not venture to add another word;

there was something in her brother's look that enjoined silence, and little as she knew of him or perhaps for that very reason, he was the only member of her family that could inspire Isabella with anything like fear. She would have scorned to acknowledge it, even to herself, but it was so.

The meal was over ; Lilian had been dismissed by her father ; the family had re-entered the Hall where the lamp burned on a central table. Mr. Osborne looked at his watch.

"It is late," he said ; "I have letters to write, I must bid you all good-night."

"There is a fire in your study," said Adèle.

She stood by the mantel-piece, with her hands clasped on its white marble edge. He went up to her, laid his hand on her shoulder, and looked at her kindly.

"Do not wait for me," he said ; "I shall be obliged to sit up late."

Very earnestly she looked at him, but she did not say a word. The door closed upon him ; Anna had resumed her place by the fireside ; Isabella and her mother were holding a private conference at the further end of the room, and Adèle remained where her husband had left her, with her eyes fixed on the blazing fire. At length she turned away, drew a seat near the table, and took out her work.

"My dear child ! what ails you ?" exclaimed Mrs. Osborne, in a tone of concern ; "you look quite unwell."

"Do I ?" said Adèle, looking up.

"I am afraid," pursued Mrs. Osborne, glancing

round to feel quite sure that Isabella had really left the room, "I am afraid you take my naughty child's jokes in good earnest."

Adèle smiled, but did not reply.

"You see, my dear," continued Mrs. Osborne, leaning over the back of her daughter-in-law's chair, and looking down at her very kindly, "young wives are apt to be too exacting—and men in business require an indulgence they do not always get. Do not trouble yourself because he did not write—far better not write than write coldly or in a hurry. Do not mind because he leaves you this evening for letters; he must begin by doing it sooner or later. Do not look at me so oddly child—on my word, I sincerely and from my heart wish you to lead the happiest life with William. My remarks may not be pleasant, but they are well meant."

And to do her justice, Mrs. Osborne spoke quite sincerely; if she also wished to separate herself from the very first from Isabella's aggressive ways towards Mr. Osborne's wife—truly we cannot blame her. Nor did Mr. Osborne's wife seem displeased; but she smiled like one amused.

"How strange all this is!" she said at length, leaning her elbow on the table and her cheek on her hand. "How very strange!" The light of the lamp fell full on her face, and Mrs. Osborne saw that it was flushed and bright, and that Adèle was smiling at something in her own thoughts.

She was smiling at images that rose out on the gloom of the past, keen, bright, half pleasing, half painful. She saw herself the half wild, rebellious

girl pining for liberty by his side. She saw him devoted, fond, in all the happiness of love and right uniting—and looking up in Mrs. Osborne's face, Adèle laughed gaily. What! she forgotten, neglected by him! It was a delusion so strange, that it could only move her laughter. But Mrs. Osborne looked amazed; Adèle hastened to apologise.

"Excuse me," she said, good-humouredly, "and do not think I mind Isabella. If I seem and am sad, it is because he looks so ill."

She resumed her work, and a tear trembled beneath her dark lashes and fell on the handkerchief she was embroidering.

Mrs. Osborne resumed her seat. "She seems very secure," she thought; "yet I know nothing of his face if she does not find herself mistaken yet." But it was no business of hers, and as Isabella re-entered the room at that moment, Mr. Osborne's name was mentioned no more.

Women are said to be talkers; these four women did not talk much. Anna hated the trouble; Mrs. Osborne was busy; Isabella did not condescend, and Adèle did not open her lips. She had early discovered that, though Anna liked to be made comfortable, and though Mrs. Osborne was civil, there was, and there could be no real sympathy, and consequently no real conversation between her and the family she had entered. They had lived in a world of which she knew nothing, and they spoke of it in set terms, that could not dispel her ignorance. They did not seem to care either to enlighten her. She was young, inexperienced, ignorant of a hundred

things she ought to have known, at a disadvantage in all save her beauty, of which she was so careless, that she did not seem to feel its value, and as she was, they were quite willing to leave her.

Adèle once laid down her work to look round ; Anna was sleeping by the fire ; Mrs. Osborne and Isabella were exchanging remarks in English concerning Mrs. Beaumont, who it seems—tell it not in Gath—was a little bit of a flirt. She was in her own country in her own home ; they made her feel like a stranger in a strange land, in a strange house. Oh, for the freedom of the little room where Jeanette told her old stories ; for Mademoiselle de Janson sitting in her chair murmuring at the world and its going away, for the dreaming little girl who lived in a bright, gay world, and cared for no one. Vain thought—vain wish—vain regrets. She looked at the wedding-ring on her finger. He was there, and so was she. That gold circle had magic in it ; it bound them both with chains of adamant. For ever and for ever she was his and he was hers. That eternity had made her heart sick during the first weeks of their marriage. She began to feel a sort of charm in it now—a sort of sad wish to be not herself, but him—not Adèle, but the wife of William Osborne. “I have suffered,” she thought, “because I did not surrender entirely ; and to be divided is torment. But that first revolt is over now. He wished for me, and freely I gave myself ; he has me, and I will forget that liberty was sweet.” But she did not add—“I will receive as well as give ;” perhaps because she could not ; perhaps be-

cause she did not know that part of Love's happiness is to give happiness, and that a woman who does not love her husband robs him of Love's most royal gift—the power of blessing. Yet of one thing she did think; one thing she did feel. As her eyes wandered over the cold circle of cold faces amongst which she sat a little unloved stranger, she felt and thought—"They do not like me, and they are not very kind; but I may laugh at them; I have got him."

At her usual hour Adèle rose, and bade her relatives good night! They kept late hours, and slept late, and Adèle rose with dawn.

"Good evening, my dearest child!" sweetly said Mrs. Osborne.

"Good night, Adèle!" said Isabella, without looking up from her book.

"Good night!" languidly said Anna, near whose chair Adèle stood. "If it were not that I am so very comfortable, I would lift up my head and kiss you."

"I can stoop," replied Adèle, amused.

And so she did; but as her lips touched Anna's cheek, Anna's voice murmured in her ear—

"Do not let them get hold of William."

Adèle did not reply; she left the Hall, and went up to her room; but she felt like one in a dream. What made her sister-in-law use the very words of Jeannette? What made them both warn her against a danger which to her seemed mere derision? "Take him away!" she thought, "how can they? He has given himself to me as much as I have given myself

to him. If I am his wife, is he not my husband? Take him away, indeed! And what would be left to me then? But how could they take him away? Is he weak, childish, or foolish? Let them if they can," she thought, with some scorn, "let them, if they dare!"

But it was a thought on which she could not linger. She sat down by the bright fire that burned on the hearth, and taking up her Prayer-book that lay on the table, she looked for something in it, which she read again and again. Then she fell into a long, deep dream.

Two struck as Mr. Osborne entered his wife's room. Her fire had burned low, and she had fallen asleep in her chair. Her dark hair had got loose, and it flowed around her pale face, and made it look more pale. With folded arms and bent look, Mr. Osborne stood on the hearth, and gazed down at his wife. Was this wan girl with thin cheeks and sunken eyes the blooming beauty of sixteen he had married five weeks ago? Could, in so short a space of time, the misery of being his wife bring down to this a light and careless girl? Oh, for the power to break the chain she found so bitter and he so galling! For his liberty vainly given for hers, gift to him so hateful, yet which he never could restore!

Mr. Osborne had been a week away and that week had told him all he could learn. Like all thoughtful men, he did not observe much; many things escaped his attention, but he only saw the farther, the deeper, when he did look, and when a fact, when a thought, seized him, he fastened on them in return, and left

them no more. A man of quicker perceptions would have perceived earlier than Mr. Osborne that his wife had not married him for love, but he would scarcely in her absence, without a clue to lead him, have arrived to the certain knowledge Mr. Osborne had attained. Better, far better, than Adèle herself, he could have said through what mixture of liking, of carelessness, of audacity, and ignorance, she had married him ; better than herself, he could have explained the silent revolt she had felt, the misery she had endured, the despair in which revolt and misery had closed. Better than herself, he could have told her real nature — light, frivolous as that of the present girl ; deep, passionate as that of the future woman. Why had she married him but because she was thoughtless ? Why had she suffered but because she was strong ? Their lives, he felt it too late, should never have met and united, for when her hour for love would rise, his would be set and gone ; when she would be capable of loving and appreciating him, he would have entered that graver period of manhood in which woman's love, if not already possessed and won since youth, is more of an affliction than of a blessing. Mr. Osborne was very proud ; and there is a calm dignity in the noon of man's life, a repose from unquietness and passion he could not wish to violate. He was quite willing to love Adèle his whole life long, and more the last day than the first ; but he had begun to love her late enough, and he could not wait for those tardy years which, like Byron's favourite epitaph, implore peace ; years in which, in man or woman, the charming and

delightful follies of youth are so unseemingly and so sad.

“Poor child!” he thought, as he looked at Adèle, still sleeping, “would I had never seen her, or rather, would she had never seen me. My lot is hard, hers is still harder. She regrets now lost freedom—and she does not know what a long, what a cold, unloving, unblest life is before her. And she will be—as she told me once—she will be seventeen in May.”

Here the prayer-book of Adèle fell from her lap on the floor. She awoke with the sound. Mr. Osborne picked it up and gave it to her, but not without first seeing that she had been reading the marriage service. He sat down on one of those little couches which the French call *vis-à-vis*, and which were first invented by fond, selfish married people, who want no stupid, foolish third between them. At once Adèle rose, and went and sat down by him; she laid her head on his shoulder, she took his hand in her own. Of course! Had she not been reading the marriage service? He bit his lip; he longed to put her away, to say some harsh, unkind word, that would scare her for ever, and teach her to come thus and there from duty; but he only looked down at her and smiled a little ironically.

“I know why you did not write,” she said; “you have been ill! I did not say so below. I saw you did not wish to speak of it, but you have been ill. I know it.”

He was a little startled at her penetration; for it was true, he had spent in a lonely room, in

a lonely inn, six days of the seven he had been away.

"You did not want me to know it," she continued, "therefore you did not write. But, oh! promise to do so no more. These last three nights I have not slept."

Without looking at her, he gave the required promise. He knew well enough, that in a certain irritating way, she was fond of him.

"That is not all," she pursued. "You have had great trouble. I see it in your face. Why have you allowed it to make you so unhappy? It must be borne, you know."

Mr. Osborne looked down at his wife, and smiled very sweetly.

"Anything can be borne," he said.

Adèle thought he meant any thing could be borne with her. Her heart beat, she raised his hand to her lips, and kissed it with humble and tender affection.

"Take him away from me?" she thought, remembering the double warning she had received. "Let them if they can—let them if they dare. He is all I have got—my friend—my husband—my lover, too—I defy them!"

Little she knew that she had lost the calm, impartial friend, on the day when she had found the lover under the lime tree; little she imagined that the lover was alienated and estranged, that the husband alone remained, and a husband who, though neither unloving nor unkind, yet cherished in his heart the memory of a great wrong. She did not know it,

still she thought: "If it were not that it is impossible, I should fancy, but it is a tiresome wicked fancy, that he likes me less."

Alas! it was no fancy; he already liked her less—bitter, inevitable result. Ay, and he felt it too, from the sort of weariness he found in sitting there with her. A low fire burned in the marble chimney; he looked at it with fixed and moody gaze; no more sacred to trust and love was that domestic hearth. Her head was on his shoulder, his hand was in hers, his arm was around her, but drearily, very drearily did he look forward to the length of years before him. He looked forward to it as a worn and impatient traveller standing on the mountain's brow measures with weary eye the low, dusty road that stretches on through the arid plain unto the goal of the far horizon.

That this clouded mood would pass away he knew. Life, experience had taught him this much; but night is dark for all that the sun may shine to-morrow, and little comfort was it for him to know that the day would come when this grief would be buried in his heart, as the dead lie buried in their graves.

But we all have our lot to bear in this world: Mr. Osborne bore his. "I have been mad," he thought, "and I must pay for it. It is just."

CHAPTER XII.

LA ROCHE AUX FÉES.

MR. OSBORNE did not appear at breakfast the next morning. Adèle was extending her hand to ring the bell, when her mother-in-law observed with a gracious smile,—

“My love, do you not know William is gone?”

“Gone!” cried Adèle, who had not seen her husband that morning.

“Yes, love; I dare say he will not be more than a few days away.”

Adèle was mute. Isabella laughed insolently.

“There never was such a man as William. I thought Adèle would be able to tell us where his lordship was gone to; but no, she knows no more than we do.”

Adèle did not answer the taunt, but her coffee remained untasted. She was beginning to feel; her shield was broken; the arrow could pierce it and wound her. Isabella was vexed with her brother; the first hint about the Baron had brought down a sharp reply; she felt in an ill humour, and as she

had that sort of bad temper that must needs vent itself on an object, she now fastened on her absent brother's wife. William was eccentric; William did not care about women; William had fits of liking; William was bitter in his very sweetness; in short, whilst she sipped her coffee Miss Osborne delivered a litany on the failings of William; Adèle heard her to the end without a word of reply. When Isabella ceased at length, Mr. Osborne's wife looked at his sister and smiled.

"Yes," she said; "but William is fond of me, Isabella."

And as breakfast was over, she rose and left the room.

"My dearest," said Mrs. Osborne to her daughter, "*we* see that William does not care much for her, let *her* think what she likes. I should like to consult with you upstairs about that letter—you know."

They left the Hall—it had kept its privileges as breakfast-room—together; they had been gone ten minutes when Adèle returned. She seemed absorbed in thought; Anna looked at her crossly, but Adèle stood on the hearth gazing at the fire. She did not feel the look. Anna had to take the trouble of speaking.

"Why did you not mind what I said last night?" she asked, sharply; "why did you let them get hold of him? Why did you not know he was gone when they did? Well, what ails you?"

For Adèle was blushing and laughing with very mischievous mirth.

"Do they know when he is coming back?" she

asked ; “ do they know where I am to meet him in an hour ? Do they know where he is taking me ? He would not tell them lest Isabella should want to come, and he wants no one but me.”

Her eyes sparkled with childish triumph ; Anna’s brow smoothed, and she smiled at the enemy’s error. But how did Adèle know this ?

“ I went upstairs to cry,” replied Adèle, frankly, “ and I found the kindest little letter on my pillow. He says I look unwell, that I want air, that I must clothe myself warmly.”

“ You know you have given me that fur thing,” put in Anna, uneasily ; “ and it would kill me to take it off.”

“ As if I wanted it again ! What can I do for you before going ?”

“ Just wheel my chair a bit nearer to the fire.”

Adèle complied with the request, and in her joy, for she felt very happy, she gave her sister-in-law a kiss.

“ Are you what is called in love with William ?” asked Anna.

“ How should I know ?” shortly replied Adèle ; “ I am very fond of him. Is that being in love ?”

“ How should I know ?” replied Anna ; “ but I hope you are not. I have always heard that when married people are in love, they can think of no one but each other—so selfish, you know.”

“ I have a mind to fall in love with him to vex her,” thought Adèle, very much provoked with that speech. “ What business has she to ask such questions and make such remarks ?”

But Anna mollified her by adding,—

“He is in love with you, of course, and you need not mind what ma said yesterday. He is the last man to get tired of a woman, only he must not be teased or interfered with.”

“I wish they would let me and my husband alone,” thought Adèle, a little impatiently, but still the words “he is in love with you, of course,” were soothing, and, like charity, covered a multitude of sins. So merely observing that it was time for her to go and dress, she left her sister-in-law to her fire-side enjoyment.

Mr. Osborne had been painfully struck with the altered aspect of Adèle, for, after all, he was fond of her, and love feels a hundred tormenting fears unknown to indifference. She was thin and pale, what if her health should ultimately suffer? He could not endure the thought. He had ascertained that since his absence she had scarcely left the house; he thought and wished to think that her life was too confined; that exercise and air would bring back the bloom to that faded cheek. The morning was grey and mild when he rose, the clouds in the sky hung heavy and low; a few days more, and they would break into white drenching rains, but for the present they tempered the sharpness of the winds, and gave spring softness to the late November season. He sat down and wrote the short pencilled note Adèle had found on her pillow.

Adèle was soon dressed. She stole down stairs unperceived, crossed the court, entered the garden, and rejoicing in her triumph, lightly ran down its

sanded alleys. She slackened her pace as she reached the orchard. No one ever came there, and there, for that reason, Mr. Osborne had asked his wife to meet him. He had made an assignation like a lover ; but not like a lover was he waiting for Adèle. He was there, indeed, sitting on a bench by the wall, but his arms were folded, his bent look was not watching for her coming. She stood within a few paces of him, looking at him rather wistfully, and he did not see her.

“What can he be thinking of?” she wondered ; “he has scarcely said ten words to me since he came back. What ails him ?”

Here Mr. Osborne raised his look and saw his wife standing before him with a shy, hesitating look. With sad earnestness he, too, looked at her. Over her usual attire Adèle had thrown one of those African Burnous of creamy-coloured wool, then newly introduced in France. Its hood was drawn over her head, and fell around her pale face in soft rounded folds that rested on her shoulders, and as with half-turned head she stood looking at her husband he seemed to see again that sad head of Beatrice Cenci, that divine image of childish sorrow and beauty, doubly sad because so young, which once seen haunts the heart for ever. With a keen pang he remembered the joyous girl tossing up the apples in the grass. The sad gravity of his countenance disconcerted Adèle. She thought him vexed, she stammered an apology.

“I am very sorry,” she said, “I am sorry I have made you wait.”

“We have plenty of time,” he replied, rising ;
“we go out this way.”

He opened as he spoke a low door in the orchard-wall. Adèle went out without venturing to ask where he was taking her. He followed her out, locked the door, put the key in his pocket, and took her arm within his, all silently. They walked a few steps up a path in the rock, then Adèle stopped short, and said emphatically,—

“Good morning ; I have not seen you to-day, you know.”

“Good morning,” he quietly replied ; “you have never been here before, have you ?”

“Never,” she answered, listlessly ; she hung her head. What ailed her husband, that his very voice was so cold ?

“Take care,” he said, “you will hurt yourself, if you do not mind those sharp stones.”

They were ascending a lonely path in a lonely mountain. It wound away without visible limit or horizon, among grey slate rocks, colourless and barren. For ever it seemed to go on as if it would climb, Titan like, to the very sky.

“Rest here,” said Mr. Osborne, after a while.

She was not tired, but she obeyed. She sat down on a ledge of rock, and leaning her elbow on her knee and her cheek on her hand, she looked around her passively. It was a wild spot, wild and silent, a sterile solitude, that seemed as if it had never felt the step, never heard the voice of man. In the cleft of a broad rock that hung above the stony path, grew a yellow tuft of grass, beaten by the wind and

withered by the autumn storms; other vegetation she saw none. Above the rock rose a solitary pine-tree, dark and melancholy, spreading for ever its broad arms to the wind, calling it with a sad low voice, and when it came, as come it did with a rush and a roar, wailing at its might. Adèle gave it a careless look, then gazed at Mr. Osborne. Why did he stand there, instead of sitting by her? Why was he so silent? why could she look at him without meeting that fond gaze, which she remembered, but which, since his return, had never rested on her? She started to her feet with a sort of impatience and unrest.

“Are you rested?” he asked.

“As if I had ever been tired!” she replied, shortly; but he did not notice her petulant tone; he did not see the slight frown that knit her brow—the flush that burned on her cheek; and if he had noticed and seen them, he would not have understood the meaning of those signs.

Again they went on; a rushing sound Adèle heard; a little more, and they stopped; the path ended; the spot was reached.

Down from a steep mountain side it rushed white and foaming, a mountain waterfall enclosed in rocks, vanishing in gloom, a swift yet enduring apparition of glittering waters and white spray coming whence none could tell, going whither none could see.

“Why this is surely the Roche aux Fées?” exclaimed Adèle, half drawing back.

Mr. Osborne turned round.

"It is," he said; "well, you are not afraid of fairies, are you?"

Adèle looked at him, and she reddened and laughed. He knew nothing; but all the warnings of Jeannette rushed back to her, and half amused—half provoked her.

"Come nearer; you see nothing here," he said, holding out his hand.

She gave him an alarmed look, and said she had rather not; but he derided her causeless fear, and before she could resist, she had been drawn to his side, and they had both descended three slippery steps of rock. Once within the roar and foam of the torrent, Adèle forgot the legendary perils of the place. An irregular ledge of stone went round the hollow in which the water fell; it was narrow, but safe to a sure foot and a steady eye.

"Will you be afraid to go there with me?" asked Mr. Osborne.

The heart of Adèle beat a little, but she recklessly replied—

"Afraid! no, why should she be afraid?"

He smiled at her daring look, and bidding her not fear, he passed his arm around her waist, and holding her hand in his, he led her along; a few steps, and the spot was reached. They stood within a yard of the waterfall; they could see it from where it rushed above to where it sank below. The heart of Adèle beat so violently against her husband's arm that he looked down, and taxed her with fear.

"No, no, it is not that!" she said; but her face covered with spray had a breathless, startled look

that belied her words. And yet it was not fear she felt then; it was that something that has no name, and that seizes and sways us when we least expect it; in crowded rooms, where languid ladies smile on still more languid men; in lonely gardens when the wind is sweeping past; by calm firesides, when the light shines on friendly faces; by wild rocks and foaming waters; by vast seas and silent shores;—anywhere, when life overflows within us, and the calmness of existence is its torment.

What would not have Adèle given to still the beatings of her heart, to send away the flush she felt burning on her cheek, to be anywhere away—anywhere on that bleak rock above, in that dark glen below, anywhere but there with him in that narrow spot where she could not move a step. She felt his look full on her, searching, penetrating, keen, and she longed for the power of flight. Suddenly and daringly she braved that gaze, and looking up, found that she had been mistaken. He still kept a firm and secure hold of her, but his other arm leaned on a projecting rock, his forehead rested on the palm of his hand, and his half-averted face was turned away from her towards the torrent.

Nature is full of mysteries; she calls us with luring voice from world and tumult; and when she has us, she sends us away far into the past—far into the future; rarely does she keep us with her in the visible present we have come to see. The spot was wild, and it had a wild sort of dreary beauty. Below the white waterfall lay the depth of rocks thrown in masses on other masses lower and farther away;

above it spread the softness of grey clouds and thin mists half torn by bare, bleak peaks. But of all this William Osborne saw nothing; he was listening to the voice of a Syren—to the call of the beloved of his youth. “What brings you here?” asked Solitude; “you know you have forsaken me. The time is gone when we loved and were blest. Do you remember that pale summer noon with me by the *Mer de Glace* on the Montanvert—when you saw the daisy grow in the rock of ice—when the scent of the Alpine rose filled the chill air—when you heard the eagle scream, and listened to the falling avalanche? Do you remember that burning morn when we stood together in the temple of Neptune in Pæstum, and saw behind its yellow columns the line of a blue silent sea where ships sail by and seek no more the fallen city? Do you remember those grey days in silent English parks where the herd of deer looked at you as they sped by, in lonely untilled heaths, above which the crow flew on heavy wing, in endless plains that never seemed to reach the far horizon? Oh, what have you been doing? You have a mill that forges iron, you have ledgers and account-books; and you have a wife, too, a young and beautiful wife; but you have me, your first-loved, the delight of your heart, the enchantment of your life—you have me no more.”

“What is he dreaming of?” wondered Adèle, with a sort of pain. “I wish he would not—it is tiresome—it is irritating. What ails him?” And secure from his absent look against detection, she too forgot the waterfall, and looking at her husband, she fell

into a long deep dream. But vainly she questioned that pale, handsome, intellectual profile; the language it spoke was one she knew not how to read: it told her no story. She looked again and again, and learned nothing for all her looking. "What is he really like?" she asked of herself, half-perplexed, half-provoked. "I have found that my husband was very different from my friend, will my husband be different from himself, and if so—how?"

"Have you enough of it?" asked Mr. Osborne, suddenly wakening from his reverie. "Do you wish to go in?"

"We are scarcely out," she said, a little shortly.

"Then sit down."

There was a convenient hollow behind her, indeed it was known as the Banc des Fées; Adèle sat down on it, and said pointedly:

"There is room for two."

He smiled at the hint, and sat down by her. Adèle saw the smile, and brightened at once.

"Where will you take me to-morrow?" she asked, assuming, with childish subtlety, that it was his intention to take her out again. He was taken by surprise, and blindly fell into the trap.

"Anywhere you please," was his prompt reply.

"Bring me here then!" she as promptly answered.

"Do you like this place so much?" he asked.

Adèle gave her husband a look which he did not understand.

"I want to know more about you," she thought; but she answered carelessly: "Oh! yes, she liked it very well."

"It is very chill, Adèle ; we must go in, or you will take cold."

"No—no—" she said, impatiently, "I must stay—I will stay—talk to me—tell me something."

"Talk to you—about what?"

"What were you thinking of whilst you were looking at that water a while ago?"

"Of places I have seen."

"What places were they?"

He made 'an effort and replied ; he described as graphically as he could, too, but Adèle saw the effort, and was stung. "It is a bore to him," she thought ; she rose abruptly, and said it was tiresome to sit there watching that splashing waterfall.

"Do you still wish to come to-morrow?" he asked, as after leading her safely back, he gave her his hand to ascend the three steps that led to the path. She turned full upon him her flushed and vexed face.

"Yes, I do," she said, and without waiting for his arm she darted down the path, carolling gaily, that he might not guess she was crying.

"Ah ! what a child I have tied myself to," thought Mr. Osborne, as he followed her down, "incapable of love, incapable even of grief, delightful in her way, but still and for ever a child."

He heard the song ; he did not see the tears. They had no sooner entered the orchard, than of her own accord Adèle took her husband's arm ; but she did not speak, nor did he.

They had not walked far in the garden, when they saw M. Morel and Miss Osborne talking at the cor-

ner of an alley. The foreman looked humble, the lady looked imperious, and neither saw Mr. Osborne and his wife.

"Monsieur Morel, I shall want you in the counting-house presently," said Mr. Osborne, coldly, and he passed on.

"You are going to the counting-house," said Adèle, looking half-vexed. "What for?"

"For business, child," he answered, surprised at the question.

"But I want you," she said; "I want you—in the conservatory, I mean."

"What for?" he asked, very simply.

"What for!" she echoed, disconcerted.

But Mr. Osborne calmly looked down, unconscious of offence.

"You are really come home," said the free voice of Isabella, who suddenly appeared before them barring their path. "I suppose I may speak to your lordship by and bye."

"Now, if you like," he said.

It was evident he considered the presence of his wife no objection. Adèle was softened at once; she smiled in his face, dropped his arm, and giving Isabella a gracious nod that plainly said: "You may have him now—I have done with him," she walked away.

Isabella tried not to look indignant, and Mr. Osborne turned to his sister like one prepared to listen.

"Have you thought about the matter I mentioned this morning?" she asked.

“Are you in a great hurry, Isabella?”

He laid his hand on her shoulder, and smiled kindly, but a little ironically, in her face.

“Oh! you may laugh!” she replied; “you are a man, and you can command life! I am a woman, and it will take me years to be where you were at twenty. Ah! to be a man!” she exclaimed, tapping her forehead and turning up her blue eyes, “to be a man, young, well born, well educated, handsome, not poor, and to have the world before me—how I would laugh at women, at marriage, and all bonds. But enough!” she added, falling back to earth and its concerns; “I hope you will not dream about it, William. I tell you I am resolved to be Madame la Baronne, and though you are not bound to help me—you are bound not to make me lose time.”

“Strictly logical! How old are you, Isabella?”

“I shall be eighteen in June. What about it?”

“A year older than my little Adèle,” he thought; but aloud he merely said:

“There is, indeed, no time to lose. Well, I shall not dream about it, as you say; but are you so very sure of being Madame la Baronne?”

“Sure! you ask me if I am sure?”

She stared amazed at the question. He smiled.

“I beg a thousand pardons, as Monsieur de Lauenay would say, and, as I said, I shall not dream, but think.”

Isabella would have liked something more explicit, but it was perfectly useless to tease Mr. Osborne. He could be annoyed easily enough; controlled or persuaded was out of the question; in his

very hesitation and irresolution he was and remained his own master.

As they entered the house, Adèle met them. Mr. Osborne looked at the two, his handsome sister, his pretty wife. Adèle was not so striking as Isabella, but she had more real beauty; yet it was not that made him rest his hand on her head and look down at her with a kind smile. "Better," he thought, "the light, childish heart, than no heart at all; better the thoughtless girl who marries and does not know why, than the clever, designing woman who, in her thoughts, is already the wife of a man that has never spoken a word of love; better for herself, and better, too, for me," he internally added, stroking his wife's smooth cheek.

"As if I would ever have had you," thought Isabella, whose conscience helped her penetration, and who looked at them both rather irefully, and aloud she exclaimed, with petulant irony,—

"Oh, dear! oh, dear! I suppose we shall have yesterday evening over again,—your dutiful wife sitting on the conjugal stool at your feet. Well, well, my husband shall give me a throne, or I will have none of him."

She opened the door of the Hall and entered it, without troubling herself about her brother or his wife.

"She is very odd," said Adèle, with a grave shake of the head.

"More than odd," thought Mr. Osborne. Bold speech was what he least forgave in woman. Take the advice of a friend, fair lady reader; be whatever

you choose ; plot for a husband, if you have not got one, and catch one if you can ; be as unwomanly as you like ; but oh ! be gentle and feminine, whatever you do. Adèle was more indulgent and more penetrating, too, than Mr. Osborne. “ A throne, indeed ! ” she thought ; “ she will be too busy in watching her husband to have time to sit on it.”

Her hand was on the door, but she saw Mr. Osborne turning away.

“ You are going,” she said, hesitatingly.

“ Yes, to the counting-house ; ” and he went.

Adèle entered the Hall, took her work-basket, and went up to the old saloon on the first floor. It looked vast and gloomy, and it felt chill ; she only crossed it, and opening a glass door, she entered the gallery which her husband had converted into a green sheltered garden. She sat by the fountain and worked patiently. “ He will come, he must come,” she thought, “ he cannot have forgotten that.”

Alas ! he had forgotten it ; he had ceased to desire being alone with his wife, and when the wish fled from his heart, oblivion came and invaded it.

Adèle worked until dusk gathered around her. The glass door then opened, the childish head of Lilian appeared, and in her clear, treble voice, she said,—

“ Papa has sent me for you.”

He had sent for her, he had not come. Sadly Adèle rose, and followed the child. As they reached the head of the staircase she paused and said,—

“ Lilian, did he kiss you to-day ? ”

“ I don’t know, I don’t know,” sang Lilian in

English, as she skipped down the staircase. She did not know, and she did not care. But Adèle knew that her husband had not kissed her cheek, had not pressed her hand that day. True, she was not in love with him—true, his fondness had often tormented and irritated her; but she was his wife, bound to him for life; she could not wish him to cease loving her; she could not wish him to have grown careless and cool after five weeks' marriage. Nor though her heart swelled did she accuse him of indifference. She only thought "He has cares, he has troubles, he is peculiar, too; I must study him, I must learn to know him, that is all."

Mr. Osborne perceived at once his wife's dull and listless looks. His inquiry of what ailed her was both prompt and kind, but it was not fond, yet Adèle thought it was — natural error. When we have once received a great truth, we cannot reject it in a moment. Mr. Osborne was altered, and he showed it more than he meant to show it, but Adèle could not see it. Her mental vision still preserved the image of the fond and happy lover whom she had the double power to charm and to bless; and for some time, at least, she could not see the saddened man whose heart she had ceased to move. His simple words, "what ails you?" sounded both tender and loving. She smiled, she said she was well; in a moment she was bright and gay. Yet when dinner was over Adèle did not sit on the conjugal stool, or, to speak more correctly, she sat on it, but did not make it conjugal by placing it at the feet of her husband. She drew it within the shelter of Anna's

chair, and remained without the little domestic circle. Mr. Osborne had no letters to write, and he stayed with his family. Mrs. Osborne was voluble, Isabella was dashing and brilliant; even Anna found something to say, but Adèle was mute as a mouse.

Adèle was thinking. Her youth had been full to overflowing with sensations delightful and enchanting, but it had rarely questioned thought, and rarely found any reply. But she thought now, perhaps because she had suffered, perhaps because her time to think was come, perhaps because she had found an object that interested her and gave food to speculation.

Her husband could see her where she sat, but he could not see that she was looking at him, nor could Isabella and Mrs. Osborne. Anna might have perceived which way her sister-in-law's eyes went, but she did not, for to look down would have made her uncomfortable. Unheeded and unwatched, with her work lying in her lap from the earnestness of her gaze, Adèle looked at Mr. Osborne as she had never looked at any one before.

To look hard at people is rude; and Jeannette had so plainly informed Adèle that to look hard at gentlemen would put strange, impertinent ideas in their head, that spite, her natural daring, Adèle had in some alarm firmly resolved never to look at Mr. Osborne so as to authorize in him an unkind thought. But now that was over, what need she fear?—nothing! She had a right to look at him as long as she liked, and she did not ask herself why she sat by Anna's chair and looked by stealth and in secret.

She looked, and certainly saw in her husband what she had never seen in him before. The sad calmness and serious dignity of his aspect oppressed her. "Shall I be afraid of him?" she thought, disturbed to experience as his wife a feeling with which he had never inspired her before their marriage. She watched him; he was smiling at one of Isabella's speeches—a courteous, calm smile, but very ironical. How could Isabella endure it? "He must never smile so at me," thought Adèle, "never! I could not bear it." She looked at him again; Mr. Osborne had fallen into one of his absent moods; his handsome countenance had resumed its natural repose. He was dreaming, and Adèle felt that he was far from her, very far away indeed.

It pained her; they were married; but what availed marriage if they were not one? She had revolted against that union because it made her suffer; but the pain had died in its own excess. Duty, inexorable necessity, sincere admiration, affection deep and true, had conquered rebellion. It was over, and it had left behind a great truth—Adèle was Mr. Osborne's wife, his companion, his equal; no more his little friend; she was truly and verily his wife; she had felt it too keenly, too bitterly, not to feel it both strongly and deeply now.

"He must not dream so," she thought, impatiently; "I will not be a little girl to be kissed, caressed, then set aside. He is fond of me, but he must be more than fond of me. Ah, if they were not here, I would draw my stool near him, and soon get to the bottom of all his dreams. Why did they come? why

was I so careless before they came?" But Adèle remembered the long lonely walk of the morrow, and she smiled. How she would do it, what she intended doing, she did not know nor care. She only felt that it would be done.

"There it is!" exclaimed Mr. Osborne, with a half start.

"Oh, how dreadful!" moaned Anna.

"I quite expected it," said Mrs. Osborne.

"What are they talking about?" wondered Adèle, wakening from her long reverie.

A rushing sound soon told her. The clouds had broken; the threatened rain had come; it was pouring in torrents.

"Good-bye to the Roche aux Féés," thought Adèle. "Well, never mind, opportunities cannot fail me; if they do, I will make them; I am his wife. I have given him all I had to give. If I can keep back nothing from him, shall he keep back from me the better and nobler part of himself? He shall not; he shall take me to his heart figuratively as well as really. Truly I will not stand at the door when it is my privilege and my right to get in."

Here she paused, half-pleased, half-frightened at making the attempt; and still looking at her husband, she felt the vague wakening in her heart of agitation and unrest, the vague foreboding of unborn storms.

CHAPTER XIII.

REGRET.

It rained for a month.

It was raining fast, as Mr. Osborne paced up and down the old Hall with folded arms and thoughtful brow, whilst his stepmother stood and looked at him with a fixed, meditative gaze. She saw him well, for the lamp that burned on the table gave a clear white light that illumined his whole face ; the pale forehead shaded by dark curls, the brow contracted by sad or bitter thoughts, the dark eye fixed in a dream, the rigid features and compressed lips, told her but one story : Mr. Osborne was ill in body or in mind.

They were alone, for Adèle had just gone up to her room, and Isabella was with her sister, who had a cold. Mrs. Osborne availed herself of the opportunity.

“ William,” she said, “ you are unwell. I wish—”

“ Nothing ails me,” he interrupted.

“ I wish you would see a medical man,” she pur-

sued. He looked annoyed; "if not for yourself, for your wife," she added.

Mr. Osborne stopped short, and looked at her without speaking.

"She says nothing ails her," continued his step-mother; "but she is dreadfully altered. I thought she was fretting, that there might have arisen between you some misunderstanding a few words from a friend might remove; I said as much yesterday, and was indignantly assured that you were the best of husbands—and that nothing ailed her."

"Well, I dare say nothing does ail her," said Mr. Osborne.

"Then why does she look so dreadfully ill or so wretched?"

She said no more: the door had opened; Adèle had entered. Truly none need tell him that his wife was altered—altered even since the day of the Roche aux Fées. He saw it but too well. Gloomily he gazed at her wan and desolate face.

"Is it possible!" he thought, with the secret indignation of wounded pride and offended love; "is it possible, that a girl, who married me of her own free will, spite some opposition—is it possible that she cannot reconcile herself to being my wife!"

Adèle sat down on the end of a low couch by the fire, and busied herself with the work for which she had gone up to her room; her husband bit his lip and prayed for patience, and finally went and sat down by her. He laid his hand on her shoulder, and looked in her face.

"What ails you?" he asked; "you look unwell."

She gave his searching look no reply, silent or spoken ; she merely said :

“ I am well ; nothing ails me.” Then she hesitatingly added, “ Jeannette wants some money, if you please.”

“ Oh ! very well,” he coldly answered, and without insisting further about her looks, he rose and left her side. Isabella was in the act of entering the room ; he went up to her, passed her handsome bare arm within his, and smiling at her blooming face, he said :

“ I wish to speak to you.”

Isabella laughed, looked conscious, but resisted gaily.

“ Stay with your wife, sir,” she said ; “ she has particular business with you.”

Adèle blushed, and nervously said :

“ What business should I have with Monsieur Osborne ?”

“ Monsieur Osborne ! How pretty ! Well, never mind ; you know you want some information from Monsieur Osborne. Lilian asked you to-day in what department of France the Andes were, and you said you would ask Monsieur Osborne.”

“ He is my only book,” replied Adèle, without looking at her husband.

“ Then, my dear,” said Isabella, “ open him at the article Geography, by all means, and learn where the Andes are.”

But though Adèle took up the glove, she did so with a playful grace, that pleased her husband well.

"I do not know where the Andes are," she said; "but I know the name of every mountain around Courcelles—and you do not. I know the song of the blackbird from that of the thrush—and you do not. I know every grass, every weed, every flower I see—and you do not. And to crown all, I know where the sun rises and where he sets, and which way the wind blows too—and you do not."

Mr. Osborne thought his wife's justification very pretty, but he observed, smiling:

"All good knowledge, Adèle, but there would be no harm in knowing about the Andes as well."

"I went to the study to ask you," replied Adèle, "but Monsieur Mazois was with you. I stood awhile at the door."

"Listening," suggested Isabella.

"Waiting," replied Adèle; "but he did not go, so I came back with my ignorance. May I go to-morrow?" she asked, glancing at her husband.

"Certainly; Isabella, I must speak to you now."

Isabella allowed herself to be led away. The door closed upon them. Adèle looked at the fire, and smiled. "He has secrets with her," she thought; "I do not mind; but why has he never anything to say to me that none may hear?"

"I am quite ashamed of Isabella's rudeness," said Mrs. Osborne, "but William likes you as you are, whatever he may say. I hope you are sure of that."

"Do you think Isabella had the best of the argument?" asked Adèle.

"No my dear; and I see it is not that makes you look so annoyed. My love, you must not mind

about the money," continued Mrs. Osborne, sitting down by Adèle, and bending to look in her face; "husbands are so."

Adèle reddened deeply.

"He will give it to Jeannette," she said, "I do not want it; I do not care about it."

"Yes, dear, and you are not used to spend; but it is the confidence one cares for, and I assure you that William—"

"He has given me his name," interrupted Adèle; "I could cover him with ridicule by an act of folly; I could overwhelm him with shame and grief by an act of sin. Why he must have the deepest confidence in me! Mistrust me in money—mere dust! it is impossible!"

She looked pretty in the loftiness of her denial.

"My dear," said Mrs. Osborne, "I meant to point out that what might seem mistrust in another, is not such in William; but with the run of husbands it is not so; money is gold-dust to them, and they take good care of it; they will trust us with their name and honour, but not with their purse."

"I do not want William's purse," said Adèle, smiling sweetly, "for what is William's is mine; and when I took him, I took his purse too, light or heavy, empty or full."

Mrs. Osborne, too, smiled, and her blue eyes said plainly—"Yes, my love, but you do not know what there is in William's purse."

With a flush of keen pain Adèle turned her face away from that look which vainly tried to be kind, and never could be, even when its owner meant best,

and she meant no harm now—anything but heartless and cold.

The door had scarcely closed on Mr. Osborne and his sister when the latter exclaimed—

“William, Adèle will be jealous!”

“What of?” he asked, so coldly that Miss Osborne did not care to pursue the theme.

“Oh, if you look so solemn, I have done!” she said; “where are you taking me to?”

“Only here,” he replied, pushing open the door of his study.

They had been walking along a narrow ill-lit passage. They now entered a warm, bright, and solitary room. Isabella sat down in a deep arm-chair, and thence gaily looked at her brother, who, seated opposite her, gravely returned the glance.

“Madame de Launay is coming to-morrow,” he said.

“Most oracularly said.”

“She wants you for Monsieur de Launay; what answer shall she get?”

Isabella pouted.

“Don’t be tiresome, William,” she said, “you know it all lies with you.”

“With me! my part is over. I saw Monsieur Mazois to-day, and he withdrew satisfied.”

“Tell me all!” cried Isabella, with sparkling eyes.

“It was a hard bargain,” said Mr. Osborne, smiling sadly, “and the details can scarcely be pleasant to you.”

Isabella looked disdainful.

"Monsieur de Launay cannot marry a penniless woman," she said, firmly, "I should despise him as a fool if he did."

"You need not hold him for a fool then," bitterly replied her brother, "for he has shown his sense of your value by the price he set on you. Portion I have none to give you, but he has asked for the partnership, and he has got it."

Isabella jumped up, and threw her arms around her brother's neck.

"You are a darling!" she cried, enthusiastically, "and I am Madame la Baronne. Oh, for a cap, to throw it up!"

Mr. Osborne looked moody.

"You are glad to marry so—really glad," he said.

"Oh, dear! you are going to preach about love," said Isabella, sinking back in her chair. "Why, if I waited for love, who might never come, I might let the best chances slip through my fingers. Give me a gentleman with good manners, a good person, as large a fortune as I can expect, and I am satisfied to marry him. Is it my fault if I am an eagle, and not a dove?"

"Certainly not!" replied her brother, "but you misunderstood me. I am not pleading for love marriages, but I wish for something better than money, nobler than a bargain."

"Nobler than a bargain! You will never be a man of business," she said. "Well, well, I will say no more. I am grateful to you, William, truly grateful, for that thing of the partnership. I do not

think you are very fond of my poor Auguste, and I fancy it has gone sorely against the grain."

"You need not be grateful," said her brother, coldly, "nor too glad, either; the partnership and your marriage are but a plank thrown over a pit; our father's house is a falling house—it has dragged me down; take care that it does not drag down your husband too."

Isabella looked blank, but she soon rallied.

"Ah, bah!" she said, "you look at the dark side of things; besides, Auguste will see to that."

"True; and now I have no more to add, save one last warning: for God's sake, Isabella, think well before you marry; nothing is concluded as yet—you have still until to-morrow."

"I never heard anything like it!" exclaimed Isabella, looking amused; "what a pair of turtles you and Adèle must be, though you do not thrive much upon it, either of you. Come, come, do not look so wrathful. I *will* think about it, and I see you want to be alone, so good evening."

And singing gaily a popular song of the day, "Oui je suis Reine," Isabella left her brother's study, ran along the passage, and re-entered the Hall, blooming and triumphant, like a rose that has but just opened to the sun.

But her look vainly sought her mother; Mrs. Osborne had gone to sit with her darling upstairs; Adèle sat alone, and was still very busy sewing. Isabella looked at herself graciously in the glass.

"Madame la Baronne looks well," she said.

Adèle did not look up, she had heard nothing. But Isabella felt in a delightful temper.

“What a busy little bee you are,” she exclaimed, throwing herself in Anna’s chair. “Well, well, I do not think I shall sew much when I am Madame la Baronne.”

“Madame la Baronne,” slowly repeated Adèle, raising her eyes and looking so amazed that Isabella stared, then sat up, and said with evident surprise,—

“You do not mean to say William has not told you?”

Adèle tried to smile.

“He is so forgetful,” she said.

“Oh, you little simpleton!” exclaimed Isabella, seeming quite entertained; “why do you not make him tell you everything? Never mind, I shall be more communicative. You must know, then, that Monsieur de Launay is to be William’s partner, and that I am to be the partner of Monsieur de Launay, and that I am to be, as I said, Madame la Baronne. The treaty has been going on this age; the first article was signed yesterday, to-morrow the venerable Madame de Launay comes for the second; the third will come off Heaven knows when. Well, no matter, I shall dance next winter in the Tuileries with His Royal Highness Prince ——. But in waiting I must pay Anna a visit, or be called ‘so selfish.’”

And with another glance at Madame la Baronne in the glass, she left the room.

The work of Adèle dropped on her lap, she clasped

her trembling hands over it. Her husband was taking a partner, he was giving his sister in marriage ; a whole family change, serious and important, was taking place, and she alone ignorant from the beginning, learned it at length, not from his lips, but through the carelessness of one who had never liked and who only endured her, because she saw how little Adèle was in the house of which she had once vainly thought herself mistress.

Alas ! gone was the daring mood in which she had so securely vowed to enter her husband's heart. She had had opportunities plenty, and she had availed herself of none ; for there is something in a man, even in a husband, which the most daring woman, provided she be not lost to pride, will scarcely brave—his coldness.

Mr. Osborne had over-estimated his power of self-control ; with neglect, with unkindness his wife could not tax him, but, alas ! he was cold. Adèle had seen it from the day of his return, but she thought at first, "it is only a cloud," and patiently she waited for a breaking that never came. He knew not himself that he was so very much altered, but she did. And if she had not known it, would not the pity and cool neglect of Mrs. Osborne, would not the indifference alternating with rude jests of Isabella, have told her that though her husband forestalled the few wishes she expressed, that though he failed in none of those polite observances which husbands are too apt to neglect, as if the wife were no more the woman—yet he was cold to her, cold from the look of his eye to the touch of his hand.

There is a divine warmth in love which none can mistake. The fire may burn hidden, but the heat is felt if the flame cannot be seen. But though Adèle vaguely felt that whilst Mr. Osborne preserved to her all the forms of love, the spirit was absent; though she remembered a more cordial friend and a fonder husband, still she never once said to herself, "he is no longer fond of me," that would have been too hard to bear, and it was too cruel, too pitiless to imagine. No, she only said, "it is his way." But oh! how long seemed life, how long and how weary!

Even then, though pained to the very heart by his silence and the triumph it gave to unkind eyes, she could not attribute it to indifference. No, it could not be that; she was still a loved woman, but loved without esteem or trust, loved for her beauty, and for nothing else.

Here the door opened, and Mr. Osborne entered. He came and sat by his wife.

"Well," he said, "and the Andes?"

"Isabella is going to marry Monsieur de Launay," said Adèle, looking at him.

"So she has already told you?"

"Why do you take him for your partner?" pursued Adèle.

"Because I want him," he replied, slightly surprised at the abrupt question.

"Then your affairs are worse?" she persisted.

"Child, I have no affairs; nothing but a tiresome trust; but we will not speak of business."

He had taken her hand, and he was smoothing

her hair. Adèle looked at him with mingled passion and grief.

“What am I to him?” she thought; “an ignorant little girl about whose ignorance he does not care—she is pretty, that is enough. A child not fit to spend his money, not worthy to know his secrets or share his cares. Ah! I am his mistress—I am not his wife.”

She turned her pained look from his calm countenance; her eyes met her own image in the mirror before her. She saw a pale, sunken face and dim eyes. Pretty! was she pretty now? Oh! *nó*, she was not, and what had Isabella told her that morning: “My dear, man’s love, and woman’s beauty are as long-lived one as the other.”

Adèle turned full on her husband.

“I have lost all my good looks, have I not?” she said, smiling.

He replied lightly, that she was only a little pale, and he told her about the Andes. Adèle heard him, with her hand in his, with downcast eyes and aching heart. They were very near on that low couch before that burning fire, with their clasped hands—and Adèle felt immeasurably removed from her husband. She felt as if a deep though narrow river flowed between them; as if they stood on opposite shores hopelessly divided. On one bank she saw him, a man full of mind, knowledge, beauty, and all good gifts; on the other she beheld herself hopelessly sitting, a child, ignorant and untaught, with failing beauty, without power, with nothing but the sacred-

ness of the word wife to charm him. And whilst he talked on unconscious that she was not listening, Adèle bowed her humbled head, and thought of the love she once had had, and wondered if it could not return.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE LADY OF THE HOUSE.

MADAME DE LAUNAY came and went; the hand of Isabella Osborne was asked for and granted, and as that young lady herself would have said, the second article of the treaty was duly signed; but before the conclusion of this important matter, an interlude under the shape of a dinner was thought advisable in the Manor of Courcelles.

Once more the cook from Dijon made his appearance.

“Let them sneer at her if they dare, now,” said Jeannette to Jean; “let Mariette Mazois ask her to be fourteenth guest. She might look brighter, Monsieur Jean, but let the Mazois and the De Launays sneer at the lady of the house.”

Jean, who had a literal mind, took some useless trouble in assuring her that no one would think of such a thing.

“What fools men are,” muttered Jeannette.

The lady of the house did not seem unconscious of her responsibilities; she had the pale but cool

look of one who has to face some unknown peril, but who is resolved to conquer. She spent in Anna's room the whole morning of that eventful day.

Anna was shivering before a blazing fire. Her room was small, cheerful, warm as an oven; but Anna was cold and cross.

"That stupid dinner," she moaned. "Why would you have it?"

"It was Isabella's wish. Do tell me more, Anna; do tell me how to behave."

And Adèle, who stood by Anna's chair, her hand leaning on the back of it, stooped and looked most entreatingly in her sister-in-law's face.

"Be civil and attentive to every one, and you will do," replied Anna, sensibly enough.

"Well, I think I shall," replied Adèle, rising and speaking with some animation; "I should not like him to—but you have not told me what a trapezium is."

"Oh! how my head aches," moaned Anna; "and you are so taken up with Lilian and every one else, that you never come."

"Yes, I do. I come every day, and every day you tell me wonderful things, clever things to make me learned like you. Anna, he must not be ashamed of me."

"Why do you not ask him, then?"

"Oh! Anna tell me. I cannot ask him—he would laugh."

Anna moaned.

"If I tell you, will you give up teasing me?"

"I cannot promise that. He has got some new

books in English ; one on shells, you must help me with it."

Anna groaned.

"You used not to be so," she said, pathetically ; "but since Isabella laughed at you about the Andes, you have distracted me. I tell you I cannot bear it."

Adèle threw her arms around her sister's neck, and embraced her with something like passion.

"Oh ! do help me to become learned like you," she entreated ; "I like study ; I could spend days, nights at it. I am glad when he has letters to write, for then I sit up, and he does not know it. Oh ! how beautiful conchologia must be."

"I will have nothing to do with it," said Anna, crossly ; "my head aches to think how you distracted me all last week about astronomy."

"But do tell me what a trapezium is," urged Adèle ; "he was speaking about one to me this morning, and I could not imagine—make haste, Anna, Isabella is coming."

"It has five corners," said Anna.

"I thought it was an insect!"

"An insect ! how foolish you are. It is a geometrical figure."

"Ah, how ignorant I am !" thought Adèle ; "what must he think of me?"

"What closeted again with your dear Anna !" said Isabella, entering. "I should be jealous if I were William. But I suppose you are going with him to-morrow ?"

She spoke ironically. Mr. Osborne was to depart

the next morning, and his wife was, as usual, to remain behind. Adèle was moved with the taunt.

"I have not yet made up my mind," she replied, coolly.

"Namely, you know it is no use ; men hate travelling with women."

"I declare she has left the door open," moaned Anna.

"I shall shut it," said Adèle, turning away to leave the room.

"You know you are to come up when you are dressed?" said Anna.

"Yes, yes ! Good-bye !" The door closed on her.

"She will look magnificent when she is dressed," observed Isabella, surveying herself in the glass. "She looks like a little girl ; she has no colour, no spirit, no usage du monde ; she cannot say ten words without betraying the most shameful ignorance. I should be on thorns this evening if I were William."

"You have a very good opinion of yourself," drily said Anna.

"Of course I have. We all have ; and I should be a simpleton indeed if I did not know that I shall have a success to-night, and that Mrs. William Osborne will not be thought much of by the side of the future Baronne."

Anna felt too tired to argue the point. She allowed Isabella to exalt her own beauty, and sneer at Adèle. "Who will look none the worse for it," philosophically thought Anna. Her own opinion was that Adèle would behave and look respectably, and that Isabella

would, as usual, be odious and vulgar ; but loving peace and silence, she did not say so.

Adèle dressed Lilian with her own hands ; this being done, and the day being pretty well worn, she called in Madame Leroy, to hold and preside a solemn council on the much-neglected art of the toilet.

“ Madame Leroy,” she said, gravely, and giving that majestic lady a fixed look, “ you told me once that you could make a woman look anything you liked, can it be true ? ”

Madame Leroy smiled a majestic and injured smile.

“ If Madame had condescended to avail herself of my talents,” she modestly replied, “ Madame need not now put this question. I can make a woman look anything I choose, always granting her to be docile ; and I will add, that if women only knew their own power in that way, they could all look beautiful, or, at least, lovely, seductive, fascinating. ”

“ But how ? ” asked Adèle.

“ Madame cannot expect that I should tell her in a few words the arts and secrets of a lifetime. But the first thing necessary is that a woman should be fully determined to be beautiful ; she will end by convincing herself that she is beautiful : let that conviction be but strong and firm in her own mind, and it will inevitably reach other minds ; the world may dispute it at first, but in the end it will give in— ‘ Yes, she is a lovely woman ! ’ The second thing necessary is to think of nothing else than being beautiful. And the third and most important is an expe-

rienced adviser who will teach a woman how to be beautiful."

"Oh, how tiresome it must be!" exclaimed Adèle, looking alarmed.

"It is the labour and the study of a lifetime," austerey replied Madame Leroy, "but it brings its own reward."

"Well, but do tell me a few of the secrets," said her mistress; "I should like to know what you can do?"

"I can give depth to an eye," said Madame Leroy, slightly drawing back; "I can give any style I like to the head; I can alter a shape by the fashion of a dress; I can, by the proper use of colours, do what I like with a complexion."

"Could you make me look handsome this evening?" gravely interrupted Adèle—"very handsome, I mean—brilliantly handsome!"

"Nature has done so much for Madame," graciously replied Madame Leroy, "that under ordinary circumstances nothing would be easier; but Madame is the mistress of the house; she must be simply dressed; it will be more difficult. Still, if Madame will allow me to use a little pink"—Madame Leroy was too civil to employ the ugly word rouge—"I think I can answer."

"No, no," interrupted Adèle, reddening, "I want nothing of the kind."

"Then we will do without it," resolutely said Madame Leroy, like a brave general determined to win the battle *quand même*. But do not expect, oh reader, to learn from these pages the tactics of this able commander. What need you care to know how

it was done, when you are told, on good authority, that the battle was won? And do not imagine either that there was anything wonderful in the toilet of Adèle. No, Madame Leroy knew better than that. It was all pure, perfect art, the art that made a Roman lady spend two hours in laying the folds of the toga, the art that is immortalized in the drapery of the Agrippina in the Capitol. But such is human justice; the sculptor gets all the praise. Who thinks of the Madame Leroy of her day, of the tiring woman who gave to that robe of finest wool those soft long folds that breathe the very spirit of grace and womanly dignity?

Adèle said nothing when Madame Leroy's task was over, but her eyes sparkled as she surveyed herself in the glass. She wore a pale sea-green silk, flounced and ample; a profusion of light and beautiful laces, through which glittered a few gold ornaments, softened the tint which needed no subduing. The delicate freshness of a rose bloomed on her cheek; the grace of youth lent enchantment to her aspect; its divine light beamed in her eyes. "Yes," she thought, "he must, he will surely think me handsome." And light and bright as a sunbeam she stole down the staircase, and went to her husband's study. She knocked gently, and opened.

"Come in," he said, looking round.

But Adèle scarcely entered; she was fast losing the primitive innocence of the child, and acquiring the ways of woman.

"I only want to know next whom Madame Mazois is to sit?" she said, gravely.

“You must ask my stepmother ; I have no talent that way.”

But he rose and looked at her from head to foot, with evidently pleased attention. What sudden magic had effaced sadness from her aspect, and brought back beauty and bloom !

“Look at me !” cried Lilian, bursting in upon them in all the splendour of a white silk frock, with pink garnitures, and not hiding at least that she had come to be admired. “Look at me ! am I not beautiful ?”

She stood before him on tiptoe with upraised eyes ; but though her dark curls, dark eyes, and fair face, made her look very pretty indeed, Mr. Osborne did not flatter his daughter.

“Beautiful ! not you ; you are pretty well—no more.” :

“Is mamma beautiful ?” asked Lilian.

Mr. Osborne laid his hand on the shoulder of his wife, and surveyed her with smiling pride.

“Why, of course she is,” he answered ; “you have never seen any lady half so beautiful, have you, Lilian ?”

Lilian confessed she had not ; but resolutely added, she too would be beautiful when she grew up. She appealed to Adèle ; and Mr. Osborne’s wife, glad to hide her blushing, happy face, stooped, and kissing Lilian, promised her beauty and everything else she wished for. Suddenly she started back half frightened.

“A carriage !” she cried ; “what shall I do ?”

"You do not mean to say you are alarmed?" said her husband.

"Alarmed, no! Come, Lilian, come."

She seized the child's hand, and ran out with her. They entered the saloon laughing, and confronted Mrs. Osborne and her daughter. Mrs. Osborne was in black velvet, and she looked a fair, handsome lady. Isabella, arrayed in bridal white, and looking very queenly in a crimson chair, raised her eyes from a book on her lap, gave Adèle a rapid yet amazed glance, then reddened, bit her lip, and resumed her reading.

"My dear child, how charming you look!" graciously observed Mrs. Osborne. "What does William say?"

Lilian clapped her hands, danced about the room, and answered the question.

"Papa says there never has been any lady half so beautiful as mamma," she cried, "and I am to grow up like her."

Isabella threw her book down.

"Insolent little monkey!" she muttered.

"You are not beautiful like mamma," continued Lilian, "you are too big."

Isabella scathed the mischievous little elf with a lightning glance, but Lilian laughed and danced away before Adèle, seriously vexed with her, had time to chide.

"You bring her up well," began Isabella.

She said no more. The door broke open, and Capitaine Joseph burst in on his surprised family with an exuberant and happy "Me voila!" "Here I am."

A light flush rose to Mrs. Osborne's cheek; her eldest son was her best-loved child; she kissed him with some emotion, and with something like warmth she said,—

“I am glad to see you, Joseph.”

Infinitely cooler was Isabella's welcome. She all but asked what had brought him, but Capitaine Joseph never took anything ill. He smiled happily, and replied emphatically,—

“I came to squeeze the hand of a brother;” he pressed the hand of Mr. Osborne, who had followed him in, and stood by him. “And to find and embrace another sister,” he added, gallantly advancing towards Adèle. She stood with Lilian a little in the background. She stepped forward, she gave him her hand, she allowed him to kiss her cheek, and turning to Lilian, she gently said, “Kiss your uncle, Lilian,” all so frankly, all so freely, that Capitaine Joseph, though he knew his own merits too well to be surprised, was infinitely charmed. Lilian had gravely raised her face, Capitaine Joseph stooped, brushed her cheek with his yellow moustache, and rising again, he looked at her admiringly, stroked his chin, and turning to Mr. Osborne, he said condescendingly,—

“The beautiful daughter of a more beautiful mother. You remember Horace. Happy man.”

And he sighed—no doubt at his solitude.

Isabella's lip curled; Adèle looked at her husband; he was smiling at the misquotation. But as he met her look, the smile died away in bitterness; for there flashed a pale face before him, and he

heard the voice of one who wished herself dead a month after her wedding-day.

“I also came,” continued Capitaine Joseph, putting and clasping his hands behind his back and facing Isabella, “to have a look at Madame la Baronne.”

Madame la Baronne laughed, and gave a look at a glass and frankly admired her fine figure and fair head, bound with a wreath of green leaves.

“Joseph, you are tired and hungry,” said Mrs. Osborne, anxiously.

“Not at all, mamma; I ate like a wolf at Nantua, and fatigue I know not. I also came,” he resumed, confidentially addressing Mr. Osborne, “to decide finally and irrevocably which of the three—hem—you understand.”

“You will have the opportunity this very evening,” replied Mr. Osborne; “I believe their carriage is coming.”

Capitaine Joseph smoothed his moustache, glanced at his uniform bright and neat, and sauntered rather than walked to the broad and deep front window that overlooked the road, in order to see his three divinities alight. Adèle did not move, but looked dreamily at her husband, who stood by the fire-place, scarcely able to conceal his dawning weariness. But he roused himself as the door opened and the Mazois family entered.

Madame Mazois came in, blooming in purple satin, breathless and good-humoured; Monsieur Mazois’ legs were hidden by his wife’s ample skirts, but unquenched was his front of immaculate white with

edge of black coat, and in his dry face and brush-like hair of iron grey two facts were written, "I have helped to make a match; I have come to eat a dinner." Behind their parents stepped Arthur Mazois and his sisters, in pink as usual; he like a puny twig; they like three bright, stout roses stuck close to him.

"Why are there three of them?" sighed Capitaine Joseph, advancing to greet them. But the Mazois were unapproachable; they were murmuring, laughing, smiling, moving around the young mistress of the house. Its master they scarcely heeded; Mrs. Osborne, Isabella, and Capitaine Joseph they ignored. He only heard such broken speeches as,—

"You are too good—the roads are bad, but with the pleasure of meeting you in view—oh, I remember you so well. How I longed to speak to you on that evening," &c. &c. He only saw black eyes turned up in rapture, and white-gloved hands tenderly clasped, and perfumed handkerchiefs waving prettily around Adèle, with pink skirts and black legs—Arthur was vainly darting in now and then, and smiling feebly at her, whilst he pulled on his gloves, all mingling in inextricable confusion. At length the group broke up; Mrs. Osborne and her daughter were acknowledged, and Capitaine Joseph received his reward. The eldest Mademoiselle Mazois smiled sweetly on him, whilst her sisters, Louise and Marie, darting looks at the lace sleeves of Adèle, who stood listening to their papa, interjected a whispered criticism.

"Application!" suggested Marie.

"Brussels point," emphatically replied Louise ; and they too smiled at their admirer, and reciprocated his kind inquiries.

They were now seated in a row, fanning themselves slowly ; Capitaine Joseph stood before them ; one hand thrust in the bosom of his coat, the other behind his back.

"Yes," he said, "I have been here seven minutes—no more. I obtained a leave of absence in honour of the occasion. 'General,' I said, 'I must squeeze the hand of my brother, William Osborne ; I must meet my sister-in-law, a charming woman.'"

"Enchanting !" breathed the three ladies in one breath.

"I must become acquainted with my future brother, le Baron Auguste de Launay—give me three days and a-half. A day and a-half to go, half a day to stay, a day and a-half to come back."

"Then you go to-morrow ?" said Louise Mazois, whilst Marie stealthily used her eyeglass, and gave another look at the sleeves of Adèle.

"At twenty minutes past five," began Capitaine Joseph, "I leave Courcelles, and——"

A slight stir made him turn round ; the wide folding-doors had flown open : on the threshold stood a tall, stylish, fair, man who seemed stepping out of the last book of fashions, and leaning on his arm, a little brown old lady in a shabby silk and huge dowager cap trimmed with yellow ribbons.

"Monsieur le Baron de Launay, Madame de Launay," sententiously said Jean.

"Poor Isabella ! What an aunt !" thought Capitaine Joseph.

The three beauties on the couch had to raise their fans to conceal ironical smiles.

But no diffidence concerning her personal appearance disturbed the satisfaction of Madame de Launay; she nodded all round with good-humoured impertinence, and took a pinch of snuff with an air that implied: "Good people, I could buy you every one, if I chose; and as to this Manor of Courcelles, why, I could put it in my pocket, if I chose too."

But she was civil, very civil; to Adèle and Isabella especially. She looked up at one critically, and down at the other approvingly, and took another pinch of snuff.

"Come and see me," she said, patting the cheek of Mr. Osborne's wife, "and bring your sister with you," she added, nodding at Isabella; and without waiting for the reply of either—she had the unconscious insolence of one whom the world had spoiled—she turned away, and found herself opposite Mr. Osborne.

"You have a pretty wife," she said. "I wanted her."

Mr. Osborne measured his future partner—Auguste was a shadow—with his eye, and said briefly:

"You wanted her?"

"For Auguste; I have always had a fancy for Courcelles; but I thought her too young, and whilst I was waiting, you stepped in and took her. But you have made the loss good," she added, turning graciously to Isabella who had heard her with silent wrath, "so I must not complain. *Mon Dieu* Monsieur Osborne, how hard your chairs are!" she added, moving restlessly in the softest chair in

the room ; “ if I only had a stool. Why, there is one, my dear,” to Isabella ; “ may I trouble you to push it to me. I am an old woman, you know.”

The haughty Isabella pushed the stool, and Madame de Launay taking another pinch of snuff, gave her a long wicked look of her little black eyes. Mr. Osborne smiled bitterly. Galled to the quick by her strange, frank insolence, he felt what a bitter thing it is to have to lean on strength not our own.

But the dinner-bell rang ; he gave Madame de Launay his arm ; her nephew offered his to Adèle ; Monsieur Mazois supported Mrs. Osborne ; Capitaine Joseph belonged to Madame Mazois ; Isabella fell to Arthur ; there ought of course to have been more gentlemen ; but it was a strictly private dinner ; business was not to be discussed, indeed ; but the forthcoming marriage was to be announced, and a wider circle would have been an objection.

The repast was long, hot, and fatiguing, as dinners always are ; yet it was a perfect tilt between Mr. Osborne and his neighbour, the woman of business. Angular, capricious, shrewd, and impertinent, he found her. At first he resisted her courteously, but perceiving that she delighted in battle, he dropped even the most polite antagonism, and by letting her have her way, he fairly conquered her. She immediately fastened on Capitaine Joseph, her other neighbour ; and Mr. Osborne amused himself with looking at his wife. To his surprise, he saw her preside at his table with an amount of dignity, of lady-like grace, of happy vivacity, for which he would have given her, without that evidence, no

credit. He was astonished and pleased, too, and he probably looked as he felt; for every time Adèle met his eye, her cheek flushed, and her look lit. Signs of fatigue she showed none; and when the dinner was at length over, when Monsieur Mazois had proposed two toasts, one of which the Baron, acknowledged with his hand on his heart, and his fair, perfumed head low bent—Mr. Osborne had, to his horror, to answer the second in behalf of Isabella—when, in short, even the dessert was despatched, Adèle looked as blooming as a rose in June.

The guests adjourned to the drawing-room; at once Adèle made her way to her husband.

“Well,” she said, “how did I behave?”

“Admirably!” he replied.

Her face beamed with joy, and with a low, triumphant laugh she turned away. Mr. Osborne watched her curiously. From where he stood by the marble mantelpiece he commanded a full view of the whole apartment.

It was a large, warm, red room. The furniture was substantial, though ancient; the mirrors, narrow and rather dark, reflected with sufficient brilliancy every wax light; the heavy, hanging curtains indicated where windows opened on the wintry landscape without; they told about it, but excluded it securely; the wind might blow in the mountains, here it was warm and pleasant; and with a roar, as if rejoicing to burn, large brown logs blazed on the hearth, and lit up every object, from the flowers scattered in the pattern of the carpet, to the flushed

faces of the guests. Truly pleasant are such warm, well-lit rooms, with smooth, rosy gentlemen in immaculate black and white, with soft, delicate ladies on whose fair faces and plump shoulders the red firelight shines, pleasant are they with the rustling of silken robes, the creaking of shining boots, the music of low laughter, the subdued talk, the hum of various sounds, the pretty speeches. Ah, very pleasant had Adèle thought that they must be on the day when she sat in the orchard tossing apples, forgotten and excluded. But now she had entered the charmed circle, not merely to enjoy, but to rule, and she ruled like one born to the task. Mr. Osborne watched her closely; he was not dazzled, but he felt the change. Adèle was no more a child; that elegantly attired lady, graceful in her vivacity, was not the abrupt half-wild girl of sixteen, the little thing in the brown frock and white collar whom no one had minded, was gone; he saw a beautiful and young woman, to whom every one now paid assiduous court. Monsieur Mazois and Madame de Launay were playing at chess in a corner; but the game paused, their faces relaxed and smiled, when Adèle went near them. Monsieur de Launay sat between Isabella, who watched him like a cat, and Louise Mazois; but his look followed the mistress of the house wherever she went. Arthur Mazois and his sisters looked ardent; Capitaine Joseph was devoted; and Mrs. Osborne, forgotten and neglected, sat by Madame Mazois, who was fast asleep in her arm-chair. "How the little thing likes it," thought Mr. Osborne, as he heard the gay, light laugh of Adèle.

She stood near Monsieur de Launay, listening with an amused face to some flowery speech of his, and looking so happy, though not at all through him, that her husband smiled. It was the first time he had seen and heard her so gay since their marriage. Capitaine Joseph stepped across the carpet, planted himself on the rug, turned his back to the fire, lifted the tails of his coat, and disturbed the reverie of his half-brother by observing—

“William, I am more perplexed than ever.”

“Indeed,” said Mr. Osborne, looking down at him.

“Indeed I am. I wish they would not sit so near one another, or be so much alike,” continued Capitaine Joseph, casting a meditative look at the three daughters of Monsieur Mazois; “but they have the same straight noses, the same black eyes, the same red cheeks and redder lips, and pray how is a man to make up his mind? Besides that, when I am away from them, the three mix themselves up into one.”

“It is a trying case,” said Mr. Osborne.

Capitaine Joseph shook his head, and nodding over at Adèle, feelingly exclaimed,—

“Ah, you were lucky, and even more wise than lucky; but sly, decidedly sly, advising me, I remember, to try my fortune there, knowing well enough that I had not a fair chance. Well, well, I am forgiving and not envious; be happy in peace, Madame Osborne looks very lovely this evening; she is decidedly the prettiest woman present,” he

added, raising his eye-glass and casting a critical glance around the room.

"Isabella looks well," drily said Mr. Osborne.

"Isabella is a fine woman," replied Capitaine Joseph; "but there is rather too much of her, and she can no more compare with Madame Osborne than——" here the Capitaine paused at a loss for a comparison.

"Than what?" asked the voice of Isabella.

Capitaine Joseph gave a start, and saw on the hearth before him the stately figure of Isabella, pale, irate, a fair-haired Nemesis, breathing revenge in her very looks. Mr. Osborne smiled and quietly walked off, leaving his unlucky brother to his fate.

"Than a servant maid is like a queen, I suppose," said Isabella, with cutting sarcasm; "truly, I have good cause to remember this evening. My future aunt does me the honour of informing me that she would have liked my sister-in-law for her niece; but that I have at least one recommendation: I am the sister-in-law of that peerless lady."

Capitaine Joseph shrugged his shoulders.

"Blame yourself. You were rude to Madame de Launay, and Madame de Launay, who is rich and accustomed to flattery, is rude to you."

"The whole Mazois tribe are at her feet," irefully continued Isabella; "it is not worship, it is adoration."

"The lady of the house," began Capitaine Joseph.

"And my brother," interrupted Isabella, giving him a look that made Capitaine Joseph feel very uncomfortable; "congratulates that happy man, her

husband, on having so beautiful a wife, so much more beautiful than his poor sister. I should not at all wonder if Monsieur de Launay were not of the same opinion," she added, with some gloom; "he is very attentive to the lady of the house, is he not? But can he do less?"

Capitaine Joseph shrugged his shoulders again, but he certainly could not help noticing that Monsieur de Launay, who now sat near Adèle, was almost more assiduous than politeness required; he nevertheless ventured to remark that good taste forbade the Baron to be too much with his future bride. A remark which Isabella received with a superb curl of the lip, but at the same time, and to her brother's infinite relief, she walked away.

"Isabella is a fine girl," thought Capitaine Joseph, "but she has an awful temper. I mistrust fair women with their golden hair; no, dark hair, blue eyes," he thought, looking at Adèle; but remembering it was useless to look that way, he mentally substituted black eyes to blue, and returned to his happy contemplation of the three blooming beauties on the couch.

"Are you not rather hot?" asked the voice of Adèle.

He looked up; she was standing on the spot her husband occupied when she unconsciously caused the luckless comparison which Capitaine Joseph began and Isabella wrathfully finished. The brow of Capitaine Joseph cleared, he smiled; he liked pretty faces, and the face he now looked at was both pleasant and pretty.

“Not too hot!” he said benignantly.

“You are a salamander,” observed Monsieur de Launay, appearing by the side of Adèle.

Capitaine Joseph was by no means charmed with his future brother-in-law: he found him insufferably vain, disgracefully conceited. He thought moreover that Monsieur de Launay might have paid a little more attention to Isabella and a little less to Adèle; he now undertook to put him down: as men do put each other down very kindly—and with that praiseworthy purpose, he said:

“Our costume is too hot. There is no doubt about it; and moreover, it does not suit us at all. It is English, and an Englishman alone knows how to wear it. Do you know,” he added, looking up most impertinently at Monsieur de Launay, “do you know anything more absurd, more ridiculous than the lively, vivacious, impulsive Frenchman attempting to mimic the cool, gentlemanlike Englishman! I repeat it: the Englishman alone in our modern days knows how to dress well; I do not say his costume is handsome, but I say it is his, and that he alone can wear it.”

Monsieur de Launay reddened slightly; but he was too well bred to take up the glove; he merely said:

“You are severe.”

“I am true: now look at Osborne. He is carelessly dressed; quite so; yet somehow or other he looks as you and I will never look, if we try ever so much to imitate that cool negligence; that superiority which is not conscious, and yet must needs be con-

fessed. It sits well on him—on us,” perfidiously added Capitaine Joseph, who was French from top to toe, and whom the wildest imagination could not accuse of Anglo-mania, “on us, my dear fellow, it would be supremely ridiculous.”

But Monsieur de Launay would not be offended.

“Well, we do not dress well, that is true enough,” he said, good-humouredly; “but our women do;” a soft, complimentary look to Adèle; “and though English ladies can equal them,” he saw Isabella approaching, “it is not in their power to surpass.”

“You actually allow us equality,” said Isabella, confronting him; but Monsieur de Launay would not be daunted for all her stern looks. Most courteously, most graciously he reiterated his assertion, though he skilfully verged off into a little dissertation on the toilet, which might have reminded Adèle of Madame Leroy, had she been listening.

But she was not; she was looking at her husband and smiling wistfully at her own thoughts. He sat by the elder of the Mesdemoiselles Mazois, talking to her quietly enough, but smiling at her lively replies. “Yes,” thought Adèle, “they see the cool negligence, the unconscious superiority, but how idly they talk; how blind they must be not to see that these peculiarities are his essentially; that no one could attempt imitating them, no, not more than his handsome face and his elegant carriage. Who is—who could be like Monsieur Osborne?”

Monsieur de Launay had gone off with his lady-love; Capitaine Joseph, who still stood by Adèle, saw the direction her looks took, and gently pitied

her blindness. It was very pretty to see a young wife smitten with her husband ; but what could she see in that tall, stiff, awkward Englishman to doat on ! He undertook to divert her attention to a more worthy object ; he succeeded ; Adèle looked and listened ; then with a start exclaimed :

“ Monsieur Osborne is gone—and I wanted him !”

“ He has vanished,” replied Capitaine Joseph, vainly looking round the room ; “ shall I go and look for him ?” he promptly added.

“ I shall be so much obliged to you,” said Adèle, with a gracious smile ; “ but do not say I want him—only tell me where he is.”

“ Decidedly, I ought to have married her,” thought Capitaine Joseph, walking away ; “ she is a sweet woman, and I do not think that great booby cares much about her.”

Adèle leaned her elbow on the mantelpiece, and turning towards the fire, saw her own image in the glass.

Her eyes laughed, her colour deepened, her lips parted in a smile. She saw well enough that she was pretty, and very pretty. What else had every one been telling her, if not in words, yet in a hundred ways, the whole evening ? Isabella and her husband had alone been silent. About Isabella Adèle did not think, but about her husband she did. “ Why was he looking at me so much ?” she thought, with a beating heart ; “ did I say or do anything that displeased him, or did he, like Capitaine Joseph, like Monsieur de Launay, like everyone else, admire me ? Why should he not ? If he married me for

my beauty, why not like me best when I look best?"

"My dear child, I congratulate you," said the bland voice of Mrs. Osborne; "you have had quite a triumph, and our dear William must be really pleased."

Adèle turned round and smiled at her handsome mother-in-law. Mrs. Osborne had been sadly, cruelly neglected that day; but though she could not like it, she was too much a woman of the world not to take this as a matter of course, and not to hasten and pay all due homage to the rising star.

"But I hope," she resumed, "that William does not persist in his intended journey. It is snowing."

"Snowing!" exclaimed Adèle, in a tone of concern; "how unfortunate."

"In the recess," whispered Capitaine Joseph, in a voice which Adèle alone could hear, as he passed by her.

Her look thanked him as much for his ready wit and discretion as for his officiousness, and she waited for an opportunity to slip away. He gave her one, by engaging his mother in close discourse, during which Adèle, first giving a rapid, half-daring, half-shy look at her image in the glass, vanished.

Mr. Osborne stood by the table where he had found Adèle sitting alone on the evening of Mrs. Osborne's dinner. He was turning over a portfolio in search of a sketch which he wished to show to Mademoiselle Mazois, when a white hand drew aside the heavy drapery that divided him from the presence of the guests, a blooming face appeared, and

finally, the slight but graceful form of his wife stood clear and bright on that sombre background. A moment she paused, then she came forward and stood by his side. She, too, remembered that evening, and as she remembered it, she smiled in his face.

“Am I like the little girl in the brown frock?” she asked—“the little girl whom no one minded until a kind friend came and sat by her, spoke to her, and even tried to amuse her, when no one else would have given her a look? Am I like her?”

“You are not unlike her to-night,” he replied, quietly; “there are days when I wish you had more of her free, happy looks.”

He had often spoken before of her altered appearance; never once of her sadness. Adèle was disconcerted, but only for a moment.

“Looks!” she said, “what are looks? I cannot take hold of them,” she added, closing her hand upon air, “and if I go into the conservatory, I can take hold of the flowers, of my beautiful bird, and of this,” she added, raising her silk skirt, “and of that,” she continued, touching the gold bracelet that encircled her round, white arm; “and I can take hold of you,” she concluded, lightly clasping his arm, “of you, to whom I owe it all—flowers, bird, silk dress, bracelet, polite speeches, everything!—of you, who are your own best gift.”

Sweet was this tender flattery, but it did not convince him.

“This is rank materialism,” said Mr. Osborne,

gravely ; “ I am more spiritual ; I think a great deal of looks, and I like happy looks.”

The colour of Adèle deepened beneath his fixed gaze ; she withdrew her hand ; she put it back ; and at length she said, a little tartly—

“ What matter about past looks ? I dare say there was good reason for them ; present looks are a great deal more to the purpose ; and if they tell you or any one else that I am not happy this evening, they tell an untruth.”

And she looked so smiling and so happy as she said it, that at once his brow cleared, and his eye softened.

“ I have only one wish,” continued Adèle, doubtfully, “ a wish which only you can gratify. Ah, if you would—if I only knew how to ask so as not to be refused !—how to entreat without teasing—ah, how happy I should be !”

Her eyes sparkled with the eagerness of desire ; her lips were parted with doubtful, hesitating grace ; her whole aspect had the frank and charming openness of an entreating child that is neither ashamed of wishing nor of asking, and only afraid of being denied. He was strangely moved. As she was that evening, he had never seen her since their marriage.

He took her other hand, and raised it to his lips.

“ Ask whatever you wish for,” he said, “ and if my power goes so far, you shall have it.

The heart of Adèle beat with joy.

“ Take me with you to-morrow,” she said.

“ Impossible !” he exclaimed, with a start.

“Impossible! I have your word, and I dare you to break it.”

He led her to the conservatory, and thence he showed her mountains and paths white with snow.

“I do not care,” wilfully said Adèle, “I will go with you to-morrow.”

He was sorry to have promised; he was pleased, spite of himself, at her fond persistency. He looked down at her to remonstrate and argue, but Adèle shook her head, and laughed in his face.

“I have your word,” she said, “and I dare you to break it; besides, my mind has long been made up to go; my trunk has been packed this week.”

Mr. Osborne bent his look full on her flushed face. Was that why Adèle had not for the last week looked either so sad or so pale? Was it possible, could it be, that his childish young wife liked him better than he thought? But suddenly Adèle averted her burning face, and without word or warning she was gone. Scarcely had the drapery closed upon her, when he heard her light voice, and joyous, though low, laugh in the drawing-room. Scarcely had he himself passed the threshold of the recess, when he saw her talking to old Monsieur Mazois. Her eyes sparkled with delight; her cheeks were bright and warm; radiant and triumphant was her whole aspect, and beautiful, more beautiful by far than under the old lime-tree on her wedding morn. Swift and invading as fire there ran a subtle thought through Mr. Osborne’s whole being—“His wife loved him.”

CHAPTER XV.

EXPLANATIONS.

ISABELLA sat alone by a small table, turning over the pages of a keepsake. Monsieur Mazois had for a few moments claimed the attention of Monsieur de Launay; with some alarm Mrs. Osborne noticed the angry brow and sullen looks of her daughter. She stepped over to her, and bending over her chair she whispered remonstratively—

“Do not look so, my dearest child; it will be noticed, and commented upon.”

Moodily Isabella raised her eyes and gazed on the room.

“I am used to look as I feel,” she said.

“Yes, dear, I know you are truthful—too truthful, by far, I fear, for your happiness.”

She sighed softly, but produced no visible relaxing of her daughter’s rigid features.

“Incorrigible donkey,” she thought. “His aunt has already been talking of it to me; if she sees her now, all is over.”

But Madame de Launay was too busy talking with

her nephew and Monsieur Mazois to heed Isabella's looks. Bitterly that young lady smiled, and bitterly she said,—

“Is William mad this evening, or has the universal fascination reached him? I declare he cannot take his eyes off his wife. Look at him! no lover of twenty ever seemed more smitten. Miserable infatuation!”

Her tone was getting deeper and more tragic. Her mother knew her quite capable of quarrelling publicly either with her brother or with her betrothed; and she prudently got out of the storm she could not avert, and walking away left the fair Isabella to her pleasant meditation. Her daughter saw her go over to Mr. Osborne and whisper something, whilst she looked at Adèle.

“Ay, fawn, flatter,” indignantly thought Isabella; “tell your stepson to look at his lovely wife and see how beautiful she looks—the most lovely woman present, of course. Little flattery from me shall either hear to-night.”

Her thoughts proceeded no further; Mrs. Osborne had left her stepson to go over to the three daughters of Monsieur Mazois, and Adèle availed herself of the breaking of the group between Monsieur and Madame de Launay and Monsieur Mazois to slip out of the room. Scarcely had the door closed upon her, when it opened and closed again. She turned round and saw her husband.

“Where are you going?” he asked.

“Upstairs to Anna. I promised to go and see her when I was dressed, and I forgot it.”

“I have a few words to say to you,” said Mr. Osborne; “come in here with me.”

There was a slight and unusual flush on his cheek; his look was clear, firm, and full; the hold of his hand on her bare arm was gentle, but not to be resisted. He opened a door; they entered a quiet and silent room; a lamp burned on the marble mantelpiece, and shed its glow on the smooth green baize of a billiard-table. Without giving her time to think, Mr. Osborne entered abruptly on the subject:

“You cannot come with me to-morrow,” he said briefly.

Adèle started.

“Why so?” she asked.

“It is too cold.”

“I do not mind the cold,” she said, half angrily.

“I have your word—I will go with you.”

Mr. Osborne smiled.

“What do you want to come with me for?” he asked coolly.

Tears rose to her eyes, but he remained unmoved. He thought himself beloved, and at once became a despot.

“What have I done to be so treated?” asked Adèle, with some passion; “what have I done?”

“You have wished yourself dead a month after your wedding-day,” replied her husband. He sat down and looked at her like a judge, calm without severity.

The colour forsook the cheek of Adèle; she leaned her hand on the table; she shook from head to foot;

then suddenly she slipped down on the floor at his feet.

“Get up, Adèle,” said Mr. Osborne, reddening, “you have misunderstood me. I did not speak in anger: I stated a sad truth. Rise, you pain me.”

But in vain he attempted to raise her. Her arms were clasped around him, her face looked up at him half ashamed, half smiling, her fond, humble obstinacy resisted all his efforts.

“Is that why you were so cold?” she asked; “oh! if I had only known it! Let me stay here. Do you think it humbles me?—not a bit. I know you are fond of me. So you heard me saying those mad, wicked words? Do not ask me why I said them. I knew it then—I do not know it now. I only know that I am proud and happy to be your wife.”

“Are you sure of that?” asked Mr. Osborne, with some emotion.

She laughed at the question.

“Are not you?” she replied, saucily.

He looked down at her; steadily her raised eyes met his. Beautiful, bewitching was her whole aspect; enchanting was the thought that this bright young creature had at length set her joy in loving him. A deeper flush rose to his cheek; he raised her; he clasped her to his breast, and Adèle threw her arms around his neck, and embracing him joyously, she cried, in the triumph of her heart,—

“I have got him back; I have got him back—and now let me go—I want to see Anna, let me go.”

But he did not let her go. He could not weary

of her beaming face. She saw his fond look, and again she laughed consciously.

"You like me, you admire me," she said; "but it is only your goodness that sees anything in me—I am not worthy of you; but I mean to be. I am only a little girl—I shall be a woman; I am only pretty—I shall grow beautiful; I am only clever—I shall be learned—and all in order that you may like me more and more."

Mr. Osborne knew not what to think of a fondness so sudden and so free; so unlike love in its freedom, so like it in its tenderness; but he saw that his wife was bent on charming him, and he let himself be charmed to her heart's content. He was too fond of her to be proud, and a great deal too wise to question. For a while Adèle triumphed freely; then a sudden prick of conscience urged her to exclaim:

"Ah! how much you like me! How much you must have liked me, to marry me, a foolish, ignorant little girl. Tell me what it was that pleased you so much in me—tell me that I may please you thus, for ever."

But Mr. Osborne, instead of replying, reddened a little, and rising from his chair gently put his wife away. The door had opened; Capitaine Joseph and Monsieur Mazois stood on the threshold of the room.

"Pray come in," gravely said Mr. Osborne.

They entered; Adèle bent her flushed face as she passed by them, then closed the door and vanished.

"You were looking for me," said Mr. Osborne.

“Yes,” said Capitaine Joseph, “we were.”

They drew chairs forward and sat down around the fire; Monsieur Mazois looked embarrassed; Mr. Osborne quietly expecting; Capitaine Joseph coughed, with a dubious look at his half-brother, and at length began:

“You will be sorry to learn that our friend Mazois has sustained a heavy loss.”

“Indeed!” said Mr. Osborne, looking concerned.

“I got the news through Madame de Launay,” put in Monsieur Mazois, looking as if he thought himself safe in making that remark. “She knows everything, you know. It seems she had been expecting it for some time. So she had left orders that as soon as the news came it was to be brought to her; and ten minutes ago she received it.”

Monsieur Mazois spoke in his usual slow, flurried tone; but Mr. Osborne was too courteous to betray any impatience: he merely said—

“Yes, Madame de Launay is a good man of business: I am going away to-morrow, as you know, but if I can be of any use to you, pray say so.”

Monsieur Mazois looked considerably embarrassed, and gave Capitaine Joseph an appealing glance.

“The fact is,” said Capitaine Joseph, rubbing his chin as he looked at his brother, “the fact is, my dear fellow, that you are a greater sufferer than Mazois; Dubois and Compagnie have failed.”

Mr. Osborne gave a start and bit his lip, but he promptly recovered, and merely saying, “I am very much obliged to you for the timely information;” he seemed to think no more about it. Capitaine Joseph

looked at Monsieur Mazois, who gave him a nod, and thus encouraged and urged, he spoke :

“ You are a man of business, William, and though you married a lovely woman for nothing but love, you know enough of the world to be aware that such is not the usual case. And I am sorry to say, that Madame de Launay takes that failure of Dubois and Compagnie in rather a serious point of view. She seems to think that it quite alters the matter of the partnership.”

“ And consequently of the marriage,” interrupted Mr. Osborne, rising and looking indignant; “ I thought Monsieur de Launay was a man of honour.”

“ My dear fellow, what has he to do with it?” said Capitaine Joseph; “ you know very well that his aunt is your real partner, and if she chooses to consider that this failure alters the advantages of the partnership, what can poor Auguste do?”

“ What can he do?” angrily asked Mr. Osborne; “ why, he need not have asked my sister in marriage unless he was prepared at all risks to marry her. Is it any fault of hers if Dubois and Compagnie have failed?”

“ Excuse me,” put in Monsieur Mazois; “ the marriage was conditional on the partnership, and the partnership on certain advantages that exist no more.”

Mr. Osborne did not answer.

“ It was a bargain,” observed Capitaine Joseph, very coolly, “ and unless we can observe our share of it, why should we expect the other party to observe his? Let Baron de Launay,” he added, twirling his moustache and looking fiercely at Monsieur

Mazois, who deprecatingly lifted up his hands, "let him, I say, but hint that our sister Isabella Osborne has any personal or mental defect that makes him withdraw from this engagement—and he will have some one to call him to account. But, as it is," he continued, resuming the pacific tone, "no reasonable person can blame him. And all we have to do is to get out of it with honour: that is to say, to open the matter ourselves, and inform Madame de Launay and her nephew, that under the altered circumstances, we would rather have neither partnership nor marriage. Thus the little *amour propre* of Isabella will be spared, Monsieur de Launay will not be placed in a very awkward and unpleasant position, and it will only be what happens every day in the world; a broken match."

"You are right, and I was wrong," replied Mr. Osborne, who had calmed down, and could take a cooler view of the case; "it was, as you say, a mere bargain; and if I cannot keep my share in it, why expect miracles of disinterestedness from a man whose marriage is strictly commercial? Let it be; it is, as you say, a broken match."

Monsieur Mazois and Capitaine Joseph rose, both glad and relieved to find their ungracious task safely over. As they were leaving the room, Mr. Osborne said to his half-brother—

"I shall stay here awhile; do me the favour of sending Isabella in to me. It is but right that she should know all at once."

"Ma foi, I would rather he had the telling of it than I," thought Capitaine Joseph, with a shrug.

But he fulfilled his errand, for in a few moments after the door of the billiard-room had closed upon him, it opened again, and Isabella entered, surprised and stately.

“Poor girl!” thought Mr. Osborne, “it is a cruel blow; the scheming of a year to end thus!”

“Well, sir, what have you got to say to me?” asked Isabella, a little shortly.

She stood on the hearth by him; he passed his arm around her, and drew her to his side.

“Be strong and firm,” he said, kindly, “I have bad news for you.”

She thought he was jesting, but a look of her eyes into his—they were nearly of the same height—told her he was not.

“Speak at once,” she said, impatiently.

Mr. Osborne held it as indubitable that what is called preparing people is ten times worse than the worst reality: he softened nothing.

“Dubois and Compagnie have failed,” he said; “I am the heaviest loser: the partnership is at an end, and with it your marriage. The De Launays expect me to withdraw; I must, in honour; I must, too, in common prudence, for if I do not, they will.”

But he had over-estimated Isabella’s strength; the blow was too great; pale, inanimate, she sank on the chair which Capitaine Joseph had recently occupied, and seemed unable to breathe, feel, or speak. Her brother thought she was fainting, and extended his hand to ring the bell, but she recovered sufficiently to arrest his arm.

“It will soon be over,” she said; “do not ring; make no *éclat*, for Heaven’s sake; let my shame be hidden at least.”

And laying her head on the billiard-table, she burst into a flood of tears. Mr. Osborne allowed them to flow awhile; but when that first passion had ceased, he sat down by her, and administered the best consolation he could think of.

“You are eighteen,” he said, “handsome and clever. Let but this unfortunate business rally, and I will make you marry something better than Auguste de Launay.”

“And do you think I regret him?” cried Isabella, with flashing eyes; “no, let him go. What I feel,” she added, laying her hand on her heaving bosom, “is the shame, the mortification, the cruel, the bitter humiliation of a rejected woman—for rejected I am—I know it—you know it—to the whole world it will go forth—she has been rejected.”

Her sincerity moved her brother; he liked her for that and for her own liking for him, to which he was not blind; truly was he sorry for her grief. He drew her to his side, and embraced her with more affection than he had ever shown before. But what man can love one woman, and not like other women more for her sake? That fondness for his wife which Isabella had so resentfully noticed that evening, was nevertheless the best friend she had ever had in her brother’s heart.

“Come,” he said, kindly wiping away her tears with her cambric handkerchief, “do not fret; I can promise nothing; but send in Capitaine Joseph to

me, and we shall see what can be done to make you Madame la Baronne yet."

The eyes of Isabella sparkled; she kissed her brother, gave herself a look in the glass; and, satisfied that her heightened colour would sufficiently hide her recent tears, she bounded out of the room. In a second Capitaine Joseph entered it.

"Are you a magician?" he asked. "What ails Isabella? she looks beaming with joy."

Mr. Osborne smiled.

"I have no time for explanation," he said; "but do me the favour of saying to Monsieur and Madame de Launay, that I have an important communication to make to them. If they will have the kindness of stepping into the recess in the drawing-room, I shall seek them there."

"You would be more out of hearing here," said Capitaine Joseph.

"I cannot ask a lady to come to me, nor yet to enter a billiard-room, can I?"

Capitaine Joseph thought that Madame de Launay was more man than woman, but he did not say so, but he thought, and he said, too, that, 'considering what sharp people of business the De Launays showed themselves, so much punctiliousness was scarcely necessary.

"I would not say so opposite Mazois," he added; "but, entre nous, they have acted but a poor, paltry part; and though it is impossible to resent it, it is quite possible to despise it."

For once Mr. Osborne agreed with his half-brother, but his punctiliousness, instead of lessening,

increased. He began to think it might not be quite courteous enough to send a message; to Capitaine Joseph's great surprise he retracted it, and said that he would himself be the bearer of his request.

"There is no making him out," thought Capitaine Joseph, following his half-brother out of the billiard-room. When he entered the saloon, Mr. Osborne was already by Madame de Launay's chair. She gave him a sagacious nod in reply to something which he said, looked at Auguste, who seemed in a very uncomfortable state of mind, and followed by her nephew, the woman of business rose and walked to the recess. Mr. Osborne entered it last. The drapery dropped upon him, Isabella sat by Madame Mazois, and had the pleasure of being kindly asked by that happy lady when the wedding would take place. "Poor girl—very unpleasant for her," thought Capitaine Joseph, walking away so as not to hear the reply, but he could not help looking at her; the colour had fled from Isabella's cheeks, and her eager, glittering eyes were fixed with feverish impatience on the curtain behind which her fate was being decided. "A very uncomfortable position," thought Capitaine Joseph, and he kindly resolved never to place in that awkward and unpleasant position that one of the three Mesdemoiselles Mazois whom he was to marry.

They sat behind the drapery, Madame de Launay dry, withered, business-like, tapping her snuff-box and taking a pinch of snuff with perfect unconcern, Auguste de Launay pale and silent, and Mr. Osborne, who alone spoke, quiet and collected as usual. He

had at once entered upon business, and laid before them the full extent of his losses.

“Under these altered circumstances,” he calmly added, “there is but one course open to me: to release Monsieur de Launay from the partnership.”

“Good,—very good,” put in Madame de Launay, approvingly. “I knew Monsieur Osborne was too much a man of business and a man of honour not to understand that matters were quite altered.”

She looked hard at her nephew, who did not venture to open his lips, but seemed on thorns. Unmoved with her praise, Mr. Osborne resumed from where he had been interrupted.

“And to withdraw my consent to his marriage with my sister. I cannot allow her to enter a family to which she could no longer bring as much as she would receive.”

Monsieur de Launay slapped his forehead like one distracted, and rose and walked about the room, but his aunt nodded more approvingly than before. She had never much liked the alliance, she did not like Mrs. Osborne, she disliked Isabella, they were decidedly well out of it. Still she uttered a few words of polite regret, it was only proper, and Madame de Launay knew how to do things. But to her surprise and displeasure her nephew came forward and agitatedly exclaimed,—

“I cannot—no, I really cannot give up Mademoiselle Osborne in this way; my affections are engaged, my word is passed.”

Here he paused, silenced by the quiet look his aunt gave him.

“Well,” she said, very calmly, “why do you not go on, Auguste? Your word is passed, you say—what next?”

In vain he looked imploring; she remained inexorable, and took a pinch of snuff; Mr. Osborne looked at them and smiled: this was the opportunity he wanted.

“I understand and respect your scruples,” he said, addressing Monsieur de Launay; “but I, too, have mine, and there is only one condition on which you can, with my consent, at least, marry my sister; it is, that instead of the partnership, or rather in addition to it, you will take with Isabella such a portion as shall, in the estimation of our mutual friend, Monsieur Mazois, more than balance the loss of to-day.”

A dead silence followed his words; Monsieur de Launay coloured violently, his aunt took a long pinch of snuff. She was the first to speak.

“Business is business,” she said; “excuse my asking how you can portion your sister when you are so heavy a loser?”

“Because apart from that embarrassed though large property which I have received from my father as a trust for his family, and not at all for my own use, I am master of another distinct fortune derived from my mother, and of course my own entirely. It is out of that fortune that I shall portion my sister.”

“You have a child,” said Madame de Launay, taking another pinch of snuff.

“My daughter will be too rich for her happiness,”

quietly replied Mr. Osborne ; “ she will be rich—a great deal too rich.”

“ You may have more children.”

“ I may or I may not ; but even if I have, those children yet unborn will enjoy what you call in French ‘ hopes’ *des esperances* ; I have plenty of wealthy relatives, whose inheritance I may never live to reap, but whose property will ultimately fall in to my descendants,—if I have any,” he added, smiling.

“ Pray let us say no more about it,” chivalrously cried Monsieur de Launay ; “ I shall be but too happy to obtain the hand of Mademoiselle Osborne, no matter on what conditions.”

Madame de Launay took another pinch of snuff, and nodded in a way that implied, “ I am his aunt, you know ; it is he who marries, not I—let him please himself.” But internally that sagacious lady thought, “ If he had the wealth of Cræsus he is none the less a falling man ; the house of Osborne is none the less a falling house ; no sister of his shall become my niece ; no nephew of mine shall patch up with the old and honoured name of De Launay the failing credit of a speculative foreigner.”

And Mr. Osborne, too, had his thoughts ; they re-entered the drawing-room ; Madame de Launay resumed an interrupted conversation with Mrs. Osborne, Monsieur le Baron, Auguste de Launay took up his courtship where he had left it off, and William Osborne sighed to think such a poor miserable comedy could be one of the aspects of life.

CHAPTER XVI.

ISABELLA.

FLUSHED and breathless Adèle ran up the staircase. Half-way up she met Marie, Lilian's bonne.

"Mademoiselle Lilian has fallen asleep at length," she said, complacently; "I thought she would never have done telling me how beautiful her mamma was."

"Even Marie must say something sweet," thought Adèle; and instead of going at once to the room of Anna, she diverged, and entered that of Lilian.

Lilian had not been present at the dinner, but she had for an hour and more been indulged with staying in the drawing-room. Longer she might have remained if her papa, suddenly seeing her, had not at once dismissed her to sleep and rest. Adèle had not perceived her going; and she now felt the want of bidding her little stepdaughter good night!—of kissing her in her sleep—of looking at her before she left with Mr. Osborne in the morning.

Lilian was not asleep; she lay with her black eyes wide open, but somewhat dreamy. She gazed vaguely

at her father's wife. Adèle bent over her, and kissed her fondly.

"Good night, Lilian!" she said; "I am very happy; you cannot know how happy I am, Lilian, and it is no use telling you; and yet I must tell it, for indeed I am happy—too happy to-night."

Lilian looked at her, and laughed, then turned her head away, and fell fast asleep. The night lamp was burning safely. Adèle left, descended the staircase lightly, and entered her sister-in-law's room.

"Oh, you are come, are you?" crossly said Anna; "pray do not—you have your friends below."

But Adèle would not let her go on. She threw her arms around Anna's neck; she kissed Anna's cheek, and in the triumph of her heart, she cried—

"Every one likes, every one admires me to-night, and so must you."

Anna softened, and looked at her.

"You look very pretty," she said, "quite beautiful. What does William say?"

"Nothing," quietly replied Adèle.

"Then he ought to be ashamed of himself," said Anna; "why should he not admire you as well as every one else?"

The eyes of Adèle sparkled; she laughed a little mischievously; but she did not justify Mr. Osborne.

"What can I do for you?" she asked, looking round the room.

Anna's ill temper returned at once. In a querulous tone she asked if Adèle was going to leave her? Soothingly Adèle replied that she was not going yet, but long she could not stay, as Anna knew.

“On account of those tiresome people below,” moaned Anna. “How very odd to give a dinner because Isabella is going to marry. And how ridiculous of her to think of marrying that stupid, big, foolish Baron, with his goggle eyes!”

In vain Adèle attempted to soothe Anna’s offended feelings. When Anna got into the murmuring mood, it was an enchanted forest where she roamed up and down for ever like one unable to find any issue; and she was still lamenting the folly and stupidity of her whole family, and pityingly recording her own grievous wrongs, when the door of her room opened, and Isabella entered.

With a look her brother had told her below that all was right. Deep gratification had been her first feeling; her cheek had flushed, her eyes had sparkled with joy. But on this feeling had followed the sting of a secret and bitter mortification. She knew and guessed to whom and to what she owed her lover’s fidelity, and every one would know and guess it too. Suspiciously and jealously Isabella looked at the whole Mazois family; she hated the congratulatory nod of her brother Joseph; she longed to reply, rudely or insolently, to her mother’s tender whisper.

“Oh, my love, how I have suffered! But William is an angel.”

Even William only escaped by not coming near her, or taking any notice of her. Ill fared, however, the unlucky Baron when he ventured on even so simple and innocent a remark as that the room was close.

“I find it chill,” said Isabella, with a haughty

shiver; and feeling that she could not, with any show of civility or patience, look at the man whose love cooled or warmed according to her declining or rising fortunes, she said that she must go for a few minutes to her sister Anna, and left the saloon without deigning him a second look.

She entered Anna's apartment sullen and gloomy, longing to vent on some one the bitterness of her heart; and unluckily she found Adèle there. Anna's address did not mollify her offended pride or soothe her irritated temper.

"I wonder you could find a second to spare from that lover of yours to come up here," querulously said Anna.

Isabella sat down by the fire, without answering.

"You know I cannot bear anyone to sit in that way between the fire and me," said Anna, indignant, "and you do it on purpose."

Isabella did not condescend to answer. In vain Adèle tried to avert the storm, by wheeling Anna's chair so that none of the heat the fire gave forth should be lost to her. Anna crossly asked her to leave her chair alone, and Isabella sneered loftily. At once Anna veered round.

"You need not sneer at Adèle so," she said; "she is better than you are, and kinder to me—she leaves every one to come to me—and you and Ma hate to put your foot in my room."

"We are so kindly received when we do come," said Isabella, yawning. "I hope that as you prefer Adèle to your own relatives, so you receive her more kindly."

“ I wish they would not quarrel about me,” thought Adèle, alarmed. “ What have I got to do with it?”

But so, to her sorrow, it was to be.

“ Adèle is not selfish,” persisted Anna, “ and that is why every one likes her. You are shamefully selfish.”

“ And no one likes me—thanks.”

“ Well, no one does like you—that stupid Baron does not like you. What does he marry you for?”

Isabella turned so deadly pale, that Adèle was frightened; but Isabella rallied, and merely said:

“ What does he marry me for, Anna? Pray tell me—I should like to know—it concerns me, you know.”

“ He marries you for money,” crossly said Anna.

Isabella looked at Adèle with flashing eyes: “ William has already told her,” she thought, “ and she, kind creature, has run up and told her dear Anna. Ay, such good news travel fast.” And she laughed aloud, with such bitter, dreary mirth, with a merriment that foreboded so plainly fury and wrath, that Anna, vexed to have brought this storm on herself, hesitatingly added:

“ Well, you need not laugh so—you know very well you told me yourself he did not care about you and that you did not care about him—after all, how should I have known—if you had not told me—that he was not marrying you for love.”

But vainly did Anna thus hope to allay Isabella’s wrath. It is one thing to confess boldly and daringly a humiliating truth, and another thing to be taunted with it in a presence that makes the taunt doubly

galling ; besides, if Anna had been on her deathbed, and solemnly vowed that Adèle had told her nothing, Isabella would not in her present mood have believed her dying sister. With such passion, with such bitter resentment, did she look at her sister-in-law, that Adèle, though unconscious of offence, rose alarmed, and stepped back. Isabella, too, rose and confronted her.

“I am very much obliged to you, Madame,” she said, in a voice tremulous with anger, “for your kindness. Oh! I shall deny nothing; the truth is the truth: I confess it openly. Yes, I could not be Monsieur de Launay’s wife, but for my brother’s generosity; but remember, too, that if it were not for that same foolish generosity you would not now have the power of triumphing over me. Remember, I say, why William married you.”

Adèle turned red and pale. “I do not know what you mean,” she said, at length; “I do not know what I have done, that you speak so angrily and look so vindictive. Never, willingly, have I offended you, and once for all,” she added, and her cheek flushed, and she drew up her slight figure as she spoke, “once for all I beg, that if you can respect me in no other way, you will respect me as your brother’s wife.”

“As the mistress of the house!” scornfully said Isabella.

“As the wife of the master of the house,” replied Adèle, with proud humility, “all that I have, all that I am, I owe to him—his affection,” she added, her

eyes softening, "is the only wealth I can claim as my own."

"Ay, but why did he marry you?" asked Isabella, bitterly; "why did he marry you?"

Adèle gave her a look of quiet, calm surprise.

"Because he liked me," she said.

"Not he—not he," cried Isabella, laughing; "Mamma wanted to know if he did, and I overheard him with my own ears indignantly denying that he had ever thought about you."

"Perhaps he had not, then," said Adèle, not a whit disturbed; "besides, I remember now, it was Mrs. Osborne who first told me Mr. Osborne had taken a fancy to me."

Isabella looked infinitely amused.

"Ay, just as she told him that you were fond of him—oh! you need not redden up so—I do not say that you were, nor do I say that he believed it: No—no—it was a marriage de convenance on both sides—you married him for his money—he married you because he could not help it."

Adèle looked more bewildered than angry.

"He could not help it?" she said; "why how could he not help it?—my godmother did not wish me to marry him. Why could he not help marrying me?"

"Oh! dear, how my head aches with all this talking," moaned Anna; "I wish you would be quiet, both of you, or go elsewhere."

Isabella remained moody and silent; her good angel was whispering in her ear: "Do not—do not—if not for kindness—do not for prudence,"

and she was listening to him, not convinced, but silent at least.

“Why could he not help marrying me?” persisted Adèle; “what could put such an odd idea into your head, unless you mean that he was so fond of me that he could not help marrying me, poor, ignorant, unworthy of him as I was, and if you mean that, Isabella, I can forgive you all the rest.”

The gay, mischievous triumph of her smile exasperated Isabella. “Be revenged once for all,” whispered the devil in her heart; “what, shall you be publicly bartered like a bale of goods? shall your brother be compelled to buy back your husband? shall she insolently triumph over you and add to that triumph the false boast of having been married for love? shall she have that sweet, that heavenly thought? A handsome, good, accomplished gentleman chose me amongst all women for his wife; he married me not for money, not for position, but like the men in books, [for love, and nothing but love. No, that she shall not; she either knows the truth, and she is a barefaced hypocrite, or she does not know it and she is a foolish dupe, who must once for all be humbled down and learn how much William cared for that baby face.” She looked at Adèle, and in a cold, hard, dry voice she said,—

“You know very well why William could not help marrying you. He had had the misfortune of making your godmother lose your fortune, which was large, though you choose to call yourself poor—he offered the only reparation in his power, marriage, which was accepted. He acted as a man of

honour, and you as a prudent girl. Do not imagine I blame either of you, but I must say, I consider all this pretence of love very ridiculous."

She calmly resumed her seat and took up a book from the corner of the mantelshef, but her hand shook violently, and she could not look at Adèle.

But Adèle looked at her and smiled, and from her she turned to Anna, still smiling, and with a look that said, "Did you ever hear anything like it? why, she is mad—raving mad"—but Anna did not smile, she looked dismayed; she clasped her hands, she cried, "Good gracious, Isabella, he will kill you—you know he did not want her to know it—you know he did not—oh, dear! oh, dear!" moaned Anna, "what a life we shall have of it! Oh, do not tell him she has told you, Adèle," she said, turning to her, "he will turn us all out of the house, and at this time of the year. I know it will kill me—do not tell him, dear, for Heaven's sake!"

Adèle did not reply; her arms dropped by her side, she sank on her chair pale, cold, lifeless, half dead. Isabella rose and left the room.

Loud were Anna's lamentations. What would William say? He had warned them all from the first never to interfere between him and his wife—what would he say? Oh, all was lost—they were all undone if Adèle told him."

"He shall know nothing from me," said Adèle, and rising, she asked if Anna wanted anything. But for once Anna had no wants; there was something in her sister-in-law's cold face that repelled speech.

"She is very quiet about it," thought Anna, as Adèle left the room, "she must have known all about it all along." And Anna did not know that there are some who can keep grief locked in their heart as the Spartan boy kept in his bosom the fierce wild thing that was gnawing it, without a murmur, without a moan.

Apathetic and cold Adèle descended that staircase along which she had run up a little before, escaping half joyous, half ashamed, from her husband's fond embrace.

As she stood on the last step the drawing-room door opened, and Mrs. Osborne appeared.

"My dearest love," said that gracious lady, "where have you been all this time?"

"I was with Anna," answered Adèle, in a lifeless tone.

"Anna is very naughty to have kept you so long; you are coming in, of course."

"Not yet, if you please, my head aches."

"I believe it; I always had the headache when I gave a dinner. Well, dear, sit in here awhile," she added, opening the door of the billiard-room, "the quiet, the cool, will do you good."

Adèle entered; but even from the threshold she looked at her mother-in-law.

"Excuse me if I say," she observed, "that I should like to be alone."

"My dear, that is a matter of course," said the complaisant lady.

Adèle closed the door, and bolted it within.

"I knew Isabella would break out in some dreadful way or other!" thought Mrs. Osborne, greatly alarmed at her daughter-in-law's looks; "what can it be? Oh, Anna knows, of course."

And up she ran to Anna's room. What she learned there we need not tell.

Adèle went up to the fire. "I am cold," she thought, and she shivered. She knelt down on the hearth to warm herself; then she forgot it; she clasped her hands, she bowed her head, she laid and rested it on the chair her husband had occupied, and closing her eyes, she let thought sweep over her like a flood of bitter waters.

One feeling was strong above the rest—humiliation. Adèle felt humbled to the very dust; she had given the first innocence of girlhood, the first bloom of beauty, the first freshness of a being fresh and young, to a man who married her—good heavens!—who married her from honour! She had brought those gifts so precious that Religion and Society have decreed that only the love and liberty of a man's lifetime can purchase them from woman; she had brought them to a man who took them with reluctance and regret, like offerings beautiful indeed, but rather too dearly bought. Odious, hateful, detestable was the memory of the first weeks of their marriage, of that fondness which duty had dictated, or which, thought more bitter, more humiliating still, her beauty had awakened for a moment in the cold heart of a

cold man. In his heart! Ah, she had never been there! He could have lived in the same house with her for ever, and never have wished to bind her to his being, and blend her life with his. Her youth and her beauty had pleased him as they could please any other man; they had charmed him as he could have been charmed by the same youth, by the same beauty, in any other woman. Any other woman! Ah, how many other women must he have seen and known in his wandering life, whom, had he been free, he would have preferred to her. How often when she thought him most fond, when she—vain, foolish girl—almost wished in her impatient heart that he liked her less, that he would not tease her with all that love—how often must he have been thinking with useless regret—“Oh, why, since I was to marry, why did not Providence bless me with this one or with that one, instead of this pretty, foolish child that is only fit to be the plaything or the toy of an idle hour?”

But the thought was too bitter; it called up images so tormenting, remembrances so exasperating, that like one mad Adèle rose and walked about the room wringing her hands, and moaning from very anguish. Blame her not; think her not unreasonable or mad indeed; remember that there is one feeling born and bred beyond all other feelings in a woman's heart—the pride of her being, the sense of her worth as a woman, and think that when that feeling has been outraged, even without shame in the eyes of the world, even without sin in the eyes of God, the woman who does not keenly feel that she has

been cruelly wronged has not the nature of her sex.

“He never loved me,” thought Adèle, with a swelling heart—“never—never! And this evening,—oh, this evening!” she added, her bent brow burning with a shame none could see—“this evening—do I not know that I dressed for him—looked handsome for him—that I did all I could to make him feel in his very heart that his wife was young and beautiful? He may not know it—what need I care?—I do. Did I not—like a daring girl that would bring back a lover that has grown strange, but who still fondly loves her in his heart—did I not go to him where he stood alone, and as far as I could—as far as I dared—seek to charm and allure my husband? And I succeeded—Heaven help me!—I succeeded. Oh, if I could have imagined that he did not love me with every fibre of his being, how I would have died before I would have given him a look or a smile that would have made him think—‘Really my wife is pretty;’ how I would die now before I would go to him thus, and seek to recall his fugitive fondness for the girl whom he married—fancied a little while, but never loved; whom he took not even for her pretty face, but oh, miserable humiliation, because he could not help it! And I—and I—”

She remembered his coldness which she had resolved to conquer; she remembered the recess; she remembered that room—her boasting—her triumph—her fondness; she buried her face in her hands, and burning tears scalded her fingers.

Her thoughts went no farther; they could not, they had reached the fulness of bitterness; there remained behind but a dull, silent pain, that told her she had suffered. Her tears dried; she removed her hands from her face; she looked at herself in the glass—there was a glittering light in her eyes—a bright spot burned on her cheek. “I can go in now,” thought Adèle; “neither he nor any one else will guess or know anything.” And as if nothing had happened she entered the drawing-room. Only one thing she did—she paused for a moment to see where her husband was, so as not to look there, so as not to meet his eye, or have to bear the misery of his triumphant smile.

Mrs. Osborne had returned from her daughter’s room; she looked agitated and pale, and gave Adèle a troubled, beseeching glance. Isabella was there too by the Baron; on hearing the door open she neither moved nor looked; she knew, as if she had seen her, who had entered. Adèle, with a composure and an ease that surprised herself, moved amongst her guests once more the polite mistress of the house. She smiled on Capitaine Joseph, she looked over Monsieur Mazois’ shoulder to see what cards he held; he was deep in *ecarté* with Madame de Launay. She answered with a pretty shake of the head that lady’s mimic inquiry of whether she had felt unwell, and finally she sat down by the three Mesdemoiselles Mazois, whilst Capitaine Joseph, like a good general, amused their mother.

“Is Monsieur Osborne really going to Paris to-

morrow?" asked the eldest of these three young ladies.

"He really is," replied the voice of Mr. Osborne.

Adèle looked up and saw him by her side.

"And what is more," he continued, "Madame Osborne is to accompany him."

"In this weather!" exclaimed the three daughters of Monsieur Mazois.

"My wife is a hardy little mountaineer," he replied, and his hand took hers that hung listlessly in the folds of her dress, and pressed it kindly.

The heart of Adèle beat; she felt very much inclined to cry. She could no longer wish for her husband's fondness, it would spring from a source she was too proud not to hate; all she wanted was his affection and his esteem. Oh! that she could as easily win these as she had won that liking of the eye which seeking beauty is rarely denied. Red and grave, she looked up in his face, and if eyes could have spoken, plainly would hers have said to him then, "Like me, I am your wife; like me as much as you can, too, but let not your affection humble me in your eyes or in my own. I like your grave coldness ten times better than your tenderness; that, at least, is not humiliating, this is."

But it was only a glance—rapid, transitory—which he caught and did not arrest, which told him nothing. She did not withdraw her hand from his; she smiled at his observation, and turning back to her guests, confirmed it.

“ I fear no cold.”

Here Capitaine Joseph, unable to remain so long away from his triple love, stepped over to them.

“ I appeal to you,” he said, pathetically, “ is not a soldier’s lot a sad, solitary lot ? I must depart alone to-morrow ; Osborne has a companion who shares his journey, who doubles his happiness, who lessens his cares, who charms and enchants.”

Here Capitaine Joseph’s speech—to which the three young ladies were listening with a slow motion of the fans indicative of pleased attention — was bought to an abrupt close. Madame Mazois had arisen, exclaiming agitatedly—

“ Not another second, Arthur, not another moment. Thirteen at table ! thirteen in this room ! I tell you I will have the carriage at once, and never enter this house again,” she added, “ never, never.”

Every one had arisen save Madame de Launay, who had remained sitting with her cards in her hand and who looked provoked, and every one, save that lady, now surrounded Madame Mazois. A vain attempt was made to prove that not thirteen but twelve or fourteen guests were present. But Madame Mazois gathered them in a heap like a flock of sheep, and reckoned them up on her fingers, and found that, thanks to the unexpected arrival of Capitaine Joseph, there were thirteen persons in the room, and that she had actually sat down to and eaten a dinner with twelve other individuals.

“ We shall have a death this year,” she said tragically. “ I told Docteur Guillaume about my pal-

pitations, and he only laughed. He will not laugh before the year is over. Arthur, the carriage."

Arthur looked helplessly foolish; his father coughed, and, turning to Madame de Launay, supposed there was no help for it. But Madame de Launay stoutly held her cards, and kept her seat.

"Ah! bah!" she said, addressing Madame Mazois, "it is I who will die before the year is out. Monsieur Mazois, I mark the king."

Vain attempt; Madame Mazois, wild with alarm, did not even hear her; she was leaving the room precipitately, and the only adieu she gave her hosts was—

"Thank you—I do not mind the cold—I shall never enter this house again—never."

"Of course, if you give up the game, you lose it," said Madame de Launay, sweeping up the stakes from the green card-table, and dropping them in her pocket.

Monsieur Mazois muttered something between his teeth; gave a sheepish, hurried bow, and followed his wife out of the room. Mr. Osborne courteously apologized to the eldest of the three daughters for the annoyance Madame Mazois had experienced, and Adèle chimed in with a few words as courteous as his, and more agreeable by far. Mademoiselle Mazois declared they were both too good, and all but said that her Mamma was absurdly foolish. With adieux as affectionate and prolix as Madame Mazois's had been brief, she and her sisters, and Arthur, took their leave.

"A very stupid woman," said Madame de Launay,

rising from the card-table. "I warn you, my dear," she added, addressing Adèle, "that I am not going. I mean to sleep here."

"Your room has been ready these three days," replied Adèle; "but you are not going to retire yet surely," she added, trying to smile.

"No, my dear;" she gently patted her cheek; "no, certainly not; but, I think, that as we leave early to-morrow, Mr. Osborne, Auguste, and I, will just discuss a few matters to-night."

The two gentlemen gave prompt assent. They left the room with Madame de Launay. At once Isabella rose and walked out; her mother followed her immediately.

"I had just made up my mind," muttered Capitaine Joseph, surveying himself in the glass, "provoking woman. She will have a tooth against me now, because I was thirteenth—I declare it is midnight! I must bid you adieu, my dear little sister-in-law. Confess," he added, as he took her hand, "confess that a soldier's lot is a solitary lot. Happy William, to travel with a wife who adores him! If he were only here, I would, with your permission, claim a brother's parting embrace, but since he is not, I must bid you adieu and good-night in a breath."

"Good night. Adieu," said Adèle, listlessly.

Capitaine Joseph raised her hand to his lips, and thought it felt rather lifeless; he thought, too, that Adèle heard him with rather a lustreless look; but he attributed this to fatigue, kindly recommended a

cup of hot broth before she went to bed, and left her.

Adèle remained alone in the deserted saloon. Tired, sick at heart, she sank down on a chair, and tried to collect her wandering thoughts. All she could remember was, that she had asked to go with her husband to-morrow. "And I must! I must," she thought, with a suppressed moan.

Her head was buried in her hands. She did not hear the door opening, until the bland voice of Mrs. Osborne addressed her with: "My dear, how do you feel now?"

Adèle looked up; her mother-in-law stood before her; by the fireplace, with her feet on the fender, and her elbows on her knees, sat Isabella, sullen and moody.

"I am better, thank you," quietly replied Adèle.

Mrs. Osborne raised her handkerchief to her eyes.

"My dearest," she said, from behind that useful portion of her toilet: "my dearest, I know all. Anna told me—Isabella has confessed with regret," Isabella looked up haughtily at her mother, "with the regret of a generous heart," resumed Mrs. Osborne, "that she has informed you of certain facts with which you were not, it seems, acquainted before. But, my dear child, better you should know it than not," said Mrs. Osborne, sitting down by her daughter-in-law and taking her passive hand, "it explains so much that you could not understand—it makes natural so much that must have been inexplicable to you—I cannot help, dear, thinking

that it is really an advantage to you to know what you do know. Isabella, my dear, Anna would like you to be with her a while."

Isabella smiled sternly.

"I shall not leave this room till you have done speaking," she said.

She had consented to let her mother soften, so far as it could be softened, the blow she had inflicted; but only on one condition—that she should be witness, that no concession should be made in her name she should not be present to contradict by speech, or ratify by her silence.

"I really do think it is an advantage to you," resumed Mrs. Osborne, whose task was anything but easy; "for, you see, whilst you thought William had married you for love, you were unreasonable—expecting—and now that you know—"

Adèle withdrew her hand, and rose pale and trembling.

"Monsieur Osborne did not marry me for love," she said; "I was not, I know, worthy to inspire him with that feeling; but if he had not liked me," she added, looking at Mrs. Osborne with calm pride, "he would never have married me."

"My dearest, I did not mean—"

With a gesture Adèle silenced her.

"If he had not esteemed me," she said, her eyes lighting, "he would have become a beggar rather than have allowed me to bear his name. Some men," she added, pressing her hands to her bosom, "will sell themselves to any woman for her money; but he is the last that would do that; and that he married me

is and ever will be to me a sufficient proof of his liking for me."

"Ay, my love."

But this time it was Isabella who rose and interrupted her mother's intended speech. Repentance fled, wrath returned.

"I understand your allusion to men who will sell themselves," she began, pale with passion.

"You understand nothing," said Adèle, for the first time treating Isabella with cool disdain. "I never so much as thought of you or your marriage. I need insult none to defend myself. A good man liked me well enough to marry me; I stand secure there, and I defy you both to take that from me—it is beyond your power," she added, with a smile, sad in its triumph. "I have not—I never had his love—I have his affection and his esteem. May Heaven grant you as much."

"Isabella, my love, my dearest, say nothing—for God's sake let all this cease," cried Mrs. Osborne, wishing too late she had not been so anxious to mend what could not be mended; but Isabella was loose: call back the hawk from his prey, call not back injured pride, offended self-love from their victim.

"His affection!" she said, "his esteem! ay, the affection which, as a man, he could feel for any pretty face; an esteem which has shown itself in never telling you anything. You are very kind in wishing me similar good fortune. Truly, I hope to be more to my husband than a pretty woman."

The sting went home; Adèle looked from the daughter to the mother, then at her own image in

the glass, and subdued, broken in spirit and in heart, she smiled with a sort of calm despair.

“Have your way,” she said; “be it so—I grant it, I have never been but my husband’s mistress, he liked me, as you say, for my pretty face—his esteem, his confidence I never had, never deserved, never won. I grant all this—what more have you to say? what other taunt have you to add to all the bitter taunts of the last six weeks? Speak—now is [your time.”

Again she looked at them both—they remained silent.

Adèle smiled a dreary smile.

“Even malice is exhausted,” she said, looking at Isabella; “even false pity, more insulting than malice, must needs be silent,” she continued, glancing at Mrs. Osborne; “and now hear me, for I, too, have something to say. Once for all and for ever, I forbid either of you to dare to mention to me my husband’s name. Once for all and for ever, I forbid either of you to dare to inquire into the secrets of our married life. If I have no virtues of my own that you can respect me for, I tell you that, as his wife, you shall respect me.”

She shook from head to foot; she was pale as death; she spoke in a voice so low, that it scarcely rose on the stillness of the room, so clear, that not a word could be lost. They heard her, mute and amazed. Adèle had always been light, gay, playful as a child in her very resistance. She had warded the blow with a jest, and smiled whilst they struck. And now she stood before them no more a careless

girl, but an indignant woman, giving back defiance for insult, and for scorn a scorn more deep.

“My dear Mrs. William,” began Mrs. Osborne, unconsciously adopting a form of respect she had never given Adèle before, but she did not continue; a change passed over her face, a change which imparted itself to the haughty features of Isabella. Adèle turned round; on the threshold of the recess she saw her husband standing with the half-lifted drapery in his right hand. On that sombre background his face looked not pale, but white, and it was white not with mere anger, but with a wrath so deep though so silent, that Mrs. Osborne looked uneasy, and even the haughty Isabella quailed. He looked at them both, and did not utter one word, until stepping down and crossing the room, he came to where Adèle still stood. He then laid his hand on her shoulder, and looking at them, he said in cold, measured tones,—

“Isabella, my word is passed, and it shall not be retracted; Madam,” he was addressing his step-mother, “I regret that you should compel me to say that this house can be your home and the home of your family no more.”

Isabella gave him a look of defiance, and walked out of the room; Mrs. Osborne drew herself up, and said with dignified reproach,—

“This house was mine when your father lived,” and she, too, walked out.

As the door closed upon her, Adèle looked up in her husband’s face.

“I know you like me,” she said, simply; and

stooping, she pressed her lips on the hand that still rested on her shoulder.

He sat down and made her sit down by him. Of her own accord she passed her two arms around his neck, and laid her cheek to his. Before he could speak, she said,—

“Justify yourself in nothing—do me not that wrong; I thank God for this: that there is one image that will ever remain stainless in my heart—yours. You did not, you could not be in love with a little girl like me, but you could like and esteem me enough to marry me. I ask for no more—I am happy to be your wife thus. We are not in love either of us,” she added, sadly smiling, “but we love one another, do we not?”

“I hope we do,” he said.

He looked at her fixedly. Calmly she had spoken, and calm she looked. He would have preferred passionate reproaches and floods of tears—all that a wronged woman can give vent to in a moment like this, for he would have known well enough how to charm her wrath away. But there was no need—ah, none, indeed! His wife was fond enough of him to be hurt, but she respected him too much to be angry. Ah! truly he had been dreaming that evening; she loved, but she was not in love; her pride had been wounded, but the wound had not reached her heart. No wronged love bade her upbraid her wronger and fly from his arms with passionate resentment; she could lie there calm, passive, apathetic; suffering, indeed, but resigned.

The voice of Adèle awoke him from his reverie.

"Grant me one request," she said; "let me see, let them see, that you like me, your poor little wife. Let them stay in this house, and this shall be my revenge."

"You would repent it," he said, gravely.

"They are powerless against me. Let them stay."

He hesitated—she insisted.

"They were left to you in trust," she said, softly; "remember that."

"Remember it! Ay, night and morning, and every hour of the day. Woeful was the hour when I accepted that dreary task."

"She is your sister—she is your father's widow," still pleaded Adèle.

"They are my enemies," he said, with a contracted brow, "and to live under one roof with my enemies is more than I can do."

"Because they are your enemies you must, you must."

"I cannot." And he looked inexorable.

"For my sake—do—do."

She twined her arms around his neck. She pleaded with a sort of passionate entreaty in her looks and her tones that moved his very heart. She did not love him, but could he help loving her?

"They have humbled you, my darling," he said, "and you shall be revenged. At your prayer they shall stay. They have dared to taunt you with my indifference; they shall learn now, that through you alone is a favour to be had, is a boon to be granted by me."

He spoke with a mingled tenderness and resentment that frightened his wife. His brow was knit, his eyes burned with unusual light; there was anger blending in the sweetness of his smile. "Ah!" she thought, with some passion, "if duty, honour, pity for my weakness, generous liking, can rouse him so,—what would it be if he loved a woman with his whole heart? As he does not love me—as he cannot—as he will not—never—never." If she had but spoken those reproaches it would have been well for them both; but she did not. Pride silenced her swelling heart, and sealed her trembling lips. With a sort of despair she submitted to that tenderness which was not love, to that affection which was to become a new and more bitter torment than the first. It had been hard to receive it, when she did not love; but now, with the consciousness that she owed it to honour, to duty, it was intolerable.

"Thank you! you are too good. God bless you," she said to her husband, and breaking from him with feverish passion, she exclaimed: "I must go—let me go."

But even as she spoke, a change came across her face; he thought she was fainting; she was not, but she felt sick and giddy. He did not ask what ailed her, but at once carried her up to her room, where Jeannette sat waiting.

Adèle had not lost consciousness, but she was cold as death and seemed unable to speak. Jeannette clapped her hands with a sort of despair:

"I knew they would kill her," she said; "I knew they would."

Mr. Osborne took no notice of the words, though he heard them but too well; but when Adèle was so far recovered as to be able to say, though so low, that he could scarcely hear her—

“I feel better;” he turned to Jeannette, and saying :

“Do not leave her until I come back”—a command which Jeannette thought insulting and superfluous—he left the room of his wife.

CHAPTER XVII.

REVELATIONS.

MR. OSBORNE went down to the Hall; he there found Madame de Launay and her nephew, sitting as he had left them, looking over some papers scattered on the table before them.

"I am sorry to have kept you so long waiting," said Mr. Osborne; "but some servant locked the door that admits from my study to the house. I had to go out through the garden, to get in again through the conservatory to the drawing-room—and it took time."

"I thought—I feared Madame Osborne was unwell," said the Baron, hesitatingly.

"She is faint and tired," briefly answered Mr. Osborne; and drawing a chair to the table, he added that he was quite ready to hear Madame de Launay.

"All I have to say, is this," said Madame de Launay, taking a pinch of snuff, "the partnership must be on a new basis, Monsieur Osborne, on a new basis."

He bowed assent.

"In short, you are a man of business, you understand that law of all business—interest."

"I believe it is the law of society," said Mr. Osborne, smiling.

"Precisely. We want extension; you want support; but it cannot be unconditional, Monsieur Osborne. You must pay for it—you must pay for it," added Madame de Launay, tapping her snuff-box, and looking shrewd.

Mr. Osborne pushed towards her the papers, for which he had gone to his study; Madame de Launay put on her spectacles and looked over them attentively. When she laid them down, she said, shortly:

"Well you are better off than I thought,—but how does that alter the question?"

"Why, that I want support less, and you extension just as much."

"And you will pay less, eh?" she said, giving him a quick look.

"Madame de Launay," gravely replied Mr. Osborne, "this question of the partnership has been throughout of your seeking, not of mine. You are free to stay, you are free to withdraw—at your pleasure. I shall go to Paris, not to-morrow, as I thought, but after to-morrow; I shall and must stay there some time. My affairs are not very likely to get better or worse in the meantime; you will have leisure to think: I shall expect a positive answer by my return."

"And my marriage?" put in the Baron.

"What about it?" asked his aunt.

"Do you mean to say," he exclaimed, rising and

walking up and down the room, "do you mean to say that I am to wait that eternity?" he stopped short, and stood before his aunt and Mr. Osborne, an amazed and indignant lover.

Madame de Launay shook her head and shrugged her shoulders with the pity of experience and age, for the ardour and folly of youth, and Mr. Osborne smiled at them both with a calm disdain he cared not to hide.

"Of course, you must wait," said Madame de Launay, rising; "but Monsieur Osborne will be considerate; he will not remain too long absent."

"You may rely upon that," said Mr. Osborne, kindly, and he rose too.

The Baron muttered something between his set teeth, that sounded very like an imprecation on the worldliness of the world, but he ended by calming down, took the arm of his aunt, and bowing coldly to Mr. Osborne, in a manner that implied he was the secret foe of his, the Baron's happiness, he supported Madame de Launay out of the room. The door closed upon them.

"I knew they would kill her!" thought Mr. Osborne, echoing Jeannette's word. "Good God! how long has this been going on?" A tormenting desire to know all, possessed him; he could not resist it. At once he went to his sister Anna's room. He was so absorbed and intent on his purpose, that he entered without knocking, and Anna was so absorbed in rocking herself before the fire and moaning, that she neither saw him enter the room, nor heard him bolt the door after him. Indeed, she was not

conscious of his presence until he stood before her on the hearth, when she indignantly exclaimed :

“ I will not leave the house in this cruel weather—I had nothing to do with their wickedness, and I will not go and be killed with the cold.”

“ No one need leave this house who chooses to stay in it,” quietly said Mr. Osborne; “ I have yielded against my judgment to the wish of Adèle.

“ But what had I to do with it all ?” querulously asked Anna; “ did I ever do anything to Adèle? Did I not always tell them to let her alone? that it was a shame to treat her as they did? What then had I to do with it all ?”

“ Nothing, indeed,” gravely replied Mr. Osborne, “ and I am come to you, as to the friend of my wife, to learn what her kind heart will never let me know: all that has been going on without my knowledge for the last six or seven weeks.”

“ No—no, I will tell you nothing,” cried Anna; “ it is very selfish of you to want to bring Ma and Isabella on my back—I want to be quiet—and I will be quiet.”

But Mr. Osborne was determined to know all, and accordingly he sat down like one quietly resolved.

“ Go away,” said Anna, crossly. “ I want to be alone—I tell you you shall know nothing from me. I will not make myself uncomfortable for any one.”

“ What I had to say to them is said,” quietly observed Mr. Osborne; “ they have no more to hear from me. And whether I know much or little, makes no difference to them.”

"But I have nothing to tell you," said Anna, impatiently, "nothing that you do not know."

"I know nothing save a few words that I heard to-night."

"Well then, that is all—go away."

But Mr. Osborne did not move.

"Oh, dear! oh, dear!" moaned Anna, "he will stay here the whole night, and I shall have them on my back to-morrow."

"Let them, if they dare, question my right to know what goes on in my house!" indignantly exclaimed Mr. Osborne: "Of them, of their concerns, I ask to know nothing; but they have violated my privacy, and they shall learn to their cost that I will know to the very last tittle of that past they hid so well, and which you, Anna, I cannot but say, helped them to hide."

"I—I!" cried Anna, "and might you not have known it if you had only used your eyes and your ears? They began at her from the very first day, and they went on; she let them, and you did not stop them. How was I to know you would be in such a rage all at once?"

"You are right there, Anna," said Mr. Osborne; "I should have stopped them; you are in the right."

"Of course I am!" crossly said Anna, "and what have I to do with it all? I liked her at once, when she gave me that fur thing, and they sneered at her, and told her you did not care about her, that you had not written whilst you were away, that you would get sick of her; but she only laughed, and you only patted Isabella's cheek."

Mr. Osborne gnawed his nether lip, but he only said—

“True; I was to blame there.”

“Of course you were; and then why did you tell her nothing? Why did they know all about the business, and she not a word? Isabella laughed at her for being such a simpleton, and then Ma pitied her, and told her not to mind; that you were fond of her all the same, but that she was young, and did not understand these things. Do you think it was very pleasant for her to be laughed at and pitied from morning till night?”

“Pleasant!” said Mr. Osborne, with a bitter smile.

“Well, then, why did you not stop them?” shortly asked Anna.

He silently bore with the reproach.

“If they did not go on opposite you, resumed his sister, querulously, “you yet might have seen by her looks that she was wretched; a cat could see that her heart was breaking. No, you saw nothing; you did all you could to justify their talk by your ways. You used her cruelly.”

“I!” cried Mr. Osborne, unable, even for the sake of knowing all, to bear with the unmerited reproach, “good heavens! what did I do?”

“You let them see that you did not like her—that you did not care about her. Oh, you were very kind, of course! but any one could see that you had never been fond of her!”

“Did she say that?” asked Mr. Osborne, much moved.

“ Oh, no, she never said anything of you save that you were very kind, and that she was very happy ; but one was just as true as the other. Happy ! ay, she was as happy as the birds Robert catches and ties to the foot of the table for the cat to play with. I would not, for anything in this world, lead the life she has led the last two months.”

Mr. Osborne's lips trembled.

“ Anna, you exaggerate. They have been unkind, and I have been remiss, but it has not been so dreadful.”

“ You are very selfish, and very cruel,” indignantly said Anna ; “ why, she has not had a day's peace—an hour's rest. I tell you they were always at her ; I mean Isabella ; and though she only shook her head and laughed, do you think she did not feel it ? Ah, but sometimes when Isabella stung her too much, when Ma's pity went too far, she did not laugh, she looked at them both like a poor hunted little thing, and leaned her forehead on her hand, and could not speak. I tell you that when I think of all you have let her suffer, I am amazed at you.”

“ She never breathed a word to me,” he said.

“ Of course she did not ! I told her over and over — ‘ Tell William,’ but she answered— ‘ I can see that he has plenty of cares on his mind, why should I add to them ? Besides, it is too awkward and too difficult for a man to interfere between women.’ And so she let them go on ; and they did go on,” added Anna ; “ I declare it has made my life miserable. She never came up here but Isabella was after her to say some-

thing spiteful. It was only three days ago that she was at her worse than ever."

"But why," Mr. Osborne could not help interrupting, "why should Isabella take this pleasure in tormenting my wife? Adèle has never done anything to her; why on earth hate her so?"

"Because she is your wife—because she is more beautiful than Isabella, who has a long nose and a large mouth; because every one likes Adèle, and no one likes Isabella; and last of all, because Isabella has a bad temper. She cannot be quiet herself, and will let no one be at peace."

"And what was it that happened three days ago?" resumed Mr. Osborne, after a brief pause.

"I cannot talk any more; my head aches," shortly said Anna.

"It was not about me," he persisted.

"You know very well it was!" crossly said Anna; "what else did ever Isabella teaze her save about you? She tried to laugh at her because she has not read much or seen much; but she saw it did not hurt her, so she left it off. She was at her a whole day about the Andes; but she did not mind at all Isabella's talk; she said she did not care about the Andes, and they might be where they liked; what were the Andes to her?"

"Poor child!" said Mr. Osborne, half-smiling.

"Oh, yes, it is all very well to call her poor child," sharply said Anna, "but they should not, or, rather, Isabella should not, be allowed to laugh at your wife."

"I promise you," said Mr. Osborne, rather sternly,

“that the fancy of laughing at Adèle is taken from Isabella for ever; but what was that matter about me three days ago?”

“I tell you my head aches; I wish you would go.”

“I will when you have told me that.”

“Oh, it is only like all the rest. Isabella came up to me quite triumphant. ‘I know why William married her,’ she said, and she told me, but not how she had found it out, I warned her not to tell Adèle on any account. ‘Oh, no,’ she said, ‘why should I? Let her think he was in love with her, little fool, and be happy in the delusion.’ She always spoke so when Adèle was not there; and when she saw her, the wickedness all came back to her with the opportunity. I do believe she could not help it. But she did not tell her this time; she only said when Adèle came up, ‘Adèle, I hope you will have got your good looks back by the time of William’s return.’”

“‘Is he going?’ asked Adèle. She was quite used to knowing nothing.

“‘Of course he is!’ cried Isabella, laughing. ‘Oh, dear! Auguste must be more communicative than that, or matters will not go on smoothly between Monsieur le Baron and Madame la Baronne. But mind what I say; get back your good looks, or you will lose William’s heart.’”

“‘If they were all gone, I should still have that,’ said Adèle.

“Isabella burst out laughing, and looked at me; but all she said was—

“‘Are you going with him?’

“‘He would take me if I were to ask him,’ said Adèle; ‘but I do not like to give him the trouble.’

“‘My dear girl,’ says Isabella, sneering, ‘do not put him to the proof; stay on the safe side of your husband’s love, by all means.’ With that, she walked out of the room, and Adèle stood where you are now, and pretended to look at the fire, that I might not see she was crying. After that, Isabella left her quiet for two days; at least, she said nothing opposite me until this evening, when she came up like a fury, and told her how you had not married her for love.”

“And what did Adèle say to that?” asked Mr. Osborne.

“What was she to say to it, since it was true? She said nothing; she smiled; but I saw very well that it crushed her. She had borne up all along, because she thought you loved her. When she found that you did not, she gave in.”

Mr. Osborne rose, and bit his lip; he walked about the room, trembling with nervous anger. He had learned nothing new; but he understood—with a vividness the brief scene in the saloon had not given him—the long, miserable torture his wife had endured; he felt in one moment the stings of insult, sneer, and pity, daily repeated, which she had borne for nearly two months, with a patience that sprang as much from woman’s pride, as from her goodness. And all this had taken place in his house; all this his wife had endured, and he had known nothing. In his presence all had been fair and smooth. The

jests had been mere playfulness ; pity there had been none. And behind his back, his name had been a dagger in the hands of his sister, wherewith to stab his wife. She had ascertained that nothing else would inflict a wound, and that weapon she had used without pity. What ! the woman whom in his heart he loved so fondly, that the mere thought of having conquered her coldness, had induced him to make to his sister's pride sacrifices Isabella would else never have won from him, had been, by the very one who owed all to that delusion, taunted with his indifference, upbraided with his coldness, humbled and insulted without pity. This was his reward !

" I wish you would not walk about my room, looking so savage !" exclaimed Anna, "*I* have nothing to do with it—and you make my head ache. I wish you would go. I never go to your room ; I wish you would go."

He set his teeth. " If ever they dare to breathe a word to her again," he said, passionately, " not all her prayers shall stop me—not from revenge—I scorn revenge—but from justice."

" Oh ! dear—how my head aches !" moaned Anna ; " what an evening I have had of it ! First Isabella, who comes up to fight like a wild cat ; then Ma, who comes up to know what it is about ; then Isabella, who comes again, mad with rage, to tell me that my dear Adèle is getting us all turned out ; then you, who stamp and rave, as if that mended anything,—when, if you had only been a little fonder of your wife, all this — "

“Fonder of my wife!” interrupted Mr. Osborne, angrily, “fonder of my wife! Are you mad, Anna?”

“Well, you need not fly at me. Be as fond of her as you like. And pray,” she added, moaning, “pray go upstairs to her, and leave me my room.”

“It is not over yet,” he moodily muttered, “it is not over yet.”

“Is it my room, or is it not?” indignantly asked Anna.

Mr. Osborne calmed down and smiled.

“I beg your pardon,” he said, returning to that suave courtesy through which he rarely broke, “but pray never tell me that I am not fond of her; it irritates me beyond control.”

“Yes, but you are not going,” querulously said Anna.

“I am gone. Good night.”

He drew back the bolt. Anna thus learned, to her horror, that she had been locked up, and left at once; and, as Anna had advised, he went to his wife’s room.

Adèle lay on her bed, in a dull and heavy slumber, which his entrance did not break. Jeannette sat at the foot of the bed, looking wistfully at her young mistress. Alas! what a pale, sad face it was, and how keenly he felt its sadness!

“You may go,” he said to Jeannette, who reluctantly obeyed.

When the door closed upon her, he sat down on the chair she had left vacant, and fell into a sad and bitter dream. From what Anna had told him he understood but too clearly the drama of the evening.

We have already said, that if he was absent, he was keensighted. He now saw to his own torment, how what his love and his kindness had failed to do, his involuntary coldness had all but done. How stung at the change she saw, and which others saw too; and stimulated by taunts, too bitter for any woman to bear—taunts, too, daily repeated—Adèle endeavoured to conquer back her lost lover; ay, it was as much, perhaps, to feel, show, and know her power, as because she really liked it, that she had asked to go with him—that she had come to him that evening beautiful, seductive, and fond. But what of that? it was too natural for him to resent it; and he knew the human heart—and woman's heart, especially—too well, not to be sure that in the end he would have been the gainer.

Ay, well he knew, though she did not, too well he knew that the imprudent woman who tries to charm a man's heart, shall never be able to keep her own, for she who remains cold is heartless. Well he knew, though she did not so much as suspect it, that she who voluntarily enters the magic circle of passion and love, may bid adieu to liberty. Her own spells will be thrown around her, and place her, whether she like it or not, helpless and bound at her lover's feet; happy then will it be for her if she tried to please a heart that was already won.

But what availed it to Mr. Osborne to know all this? His sister had put an end to the daring folly of his young wife. The bird was frightened away from the hand that was so ready to give it fond welcome. It was his—true—but the free will, the gay,

foolish trust which he would have prized so dearly, his were not, though they might have been; a vain girl's wounded vanity, a bad-tempered woman's irritated pride had snatched away from him that dearest blessing, the liking hard enough to win of the wayward girl he had married.

It is easy to say "Love, and you will be loved." He had loved her, and she had wished herself dead. It is easy to say that patience and kindness will do anything; he had been patient, he had not murmured or reproached; the unkindness of others and all their taunts could not prove to him and to his conscience, that he had really wronged his wife. And what had that got him?—nothing; and if he were to live with her to the end of time, he did not think it would get him more than what he had, and could not but have, unless his wife had neither soul nor heart, her friendship and her esteem. It is easy to say, "Seek love if you really wish to win love." Some cannot seek love. It is against their nature. Mr. Osborne could be fond enough of his wife, and not hide it either; but to try to win her affection by prayers or by flattery, by simulated coldness or by alternations of fondness and indifference, were things impossible to him. "A man can only love a woman," he thought, "and show it according to his nature, and when that has failed—why, let it be."

Was there too much coldness, or was there too much pride in this? Pride there might be, coldness there was not. He loved her more, infinitely more than many a lover who has shed bitter tears at the feet of his mistress; but he simply held that love

was never yet had for the asking ; and who shall blame him that he did not pray for the boon he did not think thus to win ? It did not, indeed, so much as enter his thoughts ; and, indeed, these thoughts, though they might touch upon love, so far as it concerned him, had many another topic, many another bitter theme to absorb him.

Mr. Osborne was something besides an unhappy lover. He had a world of weary cares, enough to distract any man. Heavily they pressed upon him now. He looked at the pale face of his wife. She had one trouble ; the name of his troubles was Legion. Bitterly he once more went over that evening. The falling man of business again learned with apparent unconcern the loss that half ruined him ; the brother again sacrificed part of his private fortune to the sister who violated the sacredness of his privacy, who turned into gall the one sweet drop in his life ; and, alas ! the unloved husband was again trifled with by that gentle little thing who lay there pale and still, who had come to him that evening, with pretty ways, half shy, half daring, half fond, half wayward—and for what?—to make him betray the foolish fondness of his heart, to waken there a fire she did not share !

Ah ! wonder not if though she had succeeded but too well, wonder not if though he resented with passionate resentment the cruelty and the insults she had endured ; if though he loved her dearly, wonder not that there still remained in his heart a touch of secret unspoken anger, love and pity could not quite efface away.

CHAPTER XVIII.

TIME THE CONSOLER.

THE evening was clear and mild; the snow was all gone; the winds were lulled; the stars glittered softly in a distant sky, and a crescent moon rose above the misty outlines of the mountains; pure, silver white she shone there, as she shines above the brow of Diana, the virgin huntress, the chaste and silent queen of night. But for once she won not Mr. Osborne's looks, she touched not his heart. He was walking up and down the road opposite the Manor, and with him walked grey-headed Docteur Guillaume, whose horse, a quiet, sturdy little mountaineer, Jean held at a short distance.

"I tell you nothing ails her," said Docteur Guillaume; "she is a little thing, but she is strong as steel. She is dull—amuse her—she is sad, make her happy. But my other patients are waiting; I have the honour to bid you a good evening."

He rode away, Mr. Osborne re-entered the house; he passed by the half-open door of the Hall; he heard the bland voice of his stepmother, the joyous tones of Isabella, the courteous speech of the Baron,

they were merry enough ; the storm they had raised had passed over them, and left them unharmed.

He entered his study ; he found Adèle there as he had left her, lying on a low couch by the fireside ; near her stood a low table, on which a lamp burned ; its soft green shade screened her eyes from the light ; her book was there if she wished to read, her work if she wished to work, but she neither worked nor read. A little black kitten, which she had taken under her protection, played on the rug with her worsted balls —she heeded it not ; languidly she was looking at the pale square of light which the moon shed through the glass-door on the carpeted floor. She did not so much as turn her head or change her look when her husband re-entered the room by the other door. He looked at her from the threshold ; he never saw this pale, sad girl without remembering that other girl, more blooming than the rose in the garden, more joyous than the first sunbeam of the morning, whom he had married. “ Amuse her,” he thought ; “ there was a time when she knew not what it was to be dull. Make her happy ! There was a time when she laughed in my face, and asked why she should be sad.”

He closed the door, came forward, sat down by the little table, and looking across at his wife, asked how she felt. Adèle smiled languidly.

“ Oh, nothing ails me, you know,” she said.

Ay, nothing ailed her, save that since the day of the dinner a week before, she had fallen into a silent apathy from which nothing could rouse her. Books were powerless to please ; study had lost all charm.

Ay, nothing ailed her, save that she felt useless and worthless, without purpose or aim, a clog and a tie on the life of the man who had married her. Bitter thought, over which she brooded ceaselessly.

Mr. Osborne sat down, then he rose, and walked about the room.

"Is it possible," he said, coming back to her, and speaking with something like passion, "that I cannot make you happy? Ah! child, you will learn yet there is many a sadder lot than yours."

She took his hand, and raised it to her lips.

"I am a good man's wife," she said; "he is fond of me; he will let no one teaze me now; he has brought me here, and here he keeps me, like a bird, under his wing. He is kind, very kind; he reads to me, he endures my black kitten, though he detests cats; he talks to me, he does his best to amuse me. Why, then, should I not be happy?"

"Why are you not happy, then?" he asked; "why that sad face, Adèle?"

"Perhaps because I think of you," she answered, smiling—"of you, whom weary cares are bending—of you, who shelter and toil for an ungrateful family—of you," she added, lowering her voice, "who are tied to a little girl of sixteen—ignorant, foolish, without knowledge, without experience—unworthy of you in every respect. Ah!" she continued, raising her eyes to his, and speaking with that strange, daring sincerity, which was a charm in her, because it is, and ever will be, so rare, so imprudent, and so unselfish—"ah! if you had married, not me, but such a one as I know, a woman, a

beautiful woman—good, true, accomplished, wise—fit in every respect to be your wife, to love you, and be loved—and if I had lived here with you two—your little friend.”

“Enough, Adèle,” interrupted Mr. Osborne, greatly pained, though he did not show it; for much as she had tried him, he could never, even in thought, have fancied Adèle the wife of another man. “We must not think of what might be,” he added, “but of what is. You know I am fond of you—you say it. Man cannot give, woman cannot expect, more than affection.”

“Ay, but you cannot say you married me for love,” thought Adèle. Cruel thought! that haunted her like a spectre; that made memory a ceaseless sting, an ever-new torment; bitter truth, which his kindness rendered doubly bitter, which she remembered in his arms, with her hands clasped in his, which had burned itself into her brain like a thing never again to be forgotten.

“I am going away to-morrow,” he resumed; “I cannot take you, you are too languid. I cannot leave you here alone; your old friend Madame Lasours will keep you company in my absence. She is coming this evening.”

“She is coming!” cried Adèle.

“I believe she is come,” said Mr. Osborne, rising, and even as he spoke the door opened, and the calm and handsome face of Alice appeared. In her joy, Adèle started to her feet with a motion so sudden that it upset the little table; down it fell with a crash that sent the kitten scampering to the end of the

room, and as the lamp fell with it, sudden darkness followed.

“Jean, bring a light,” said the quiet voice of Mr. Osborne.

Adèle knew how he hated rude motions and discordant sounds. She looked at his face, on which the firelight shone, and saw that he was smiling. Yet the presence of Jean with the light revealed a series of disasters. The lamp was broken, of course; worse, the carpet was stained, and far worse, a favourite book was only fit for the fire. Even whilst she embraced Alice, Adèle gave him a side anxious look; but all he said was—

“I am glad to see your old liveliness is come back; I feared it was all gone.”

“All gone!” said Adèle; “all gone! you will see whether it is all gone!”

She looked happy and mischievous as of old, and sat on the low couch with Alice, her two arms clasped around the arm of her friend. Madame Lascours smiled down at her, and smoothed her hair, and seemed in a dream. Mr. Osborne looked at his wife, pleased with her radiant face; he took a sunbeam for an abiding day.

Scarcely was their greeting over, when Mr. Osborne was called away. Monsieur de Launay wished to speak to him on some business or other. The two friends remained alone.

“Are you really come to stay?” asked Adèle.

“Yes, as long as you like,” was the calm reply of Alice. She did not see in the flushed face of Adèle the great change Mr. Osborne had led her to expect.

“Oh, it was so like him to ask you to come!” exclaimed Adèle; “he knew there was nothing I should like so well.”

“I would have come before, if I had known you were unwell.”

“I am not unwell, or, at least, nothing serious ails me; but he is so kind. What do you think of him? How do you like him?—very much, of course! No, pray do not give me a polite answer. Tell me truly whether you like him or not. I know that one must either like or dislike him; and yet how can one dislike him? *I* liked him the first moment I saw him!”

Madame Lascours was sitting on the couch with Adèle; her arm was passed around the waist of her little friend, her other hand held that of Mr. Osborne’s wife. “Ah!” she thought, “well he may be fond of her—she was made to waken love, and charm it for ever.”

“Well—what are you dreaming about?” asked Adèle, laughing. “You are just as absent as he is.”

“Do you not know,” quietly said Madame Lascours, “that I was acquainted with your husband years ago, in this very house?”

The eyes of Adèle opened wide. She looked surprised and a little provoked.

“I declare you are two of the most secretive people in this world,” she exclaimed. “What! I

have been praising him to you and you to him all this time, and you never so much as told me that, either of you.”

Alice smiled.

“It was so long ago,” she said, “that we had time to forget it. Ah! water has flowed under the bridge, as people say, since those days.”

“Is he altered?” asked Adèle, with some eagerness; “is he the same now that he was then?”

“He looks the same.”

“Is he——” began Adèle. “Ah! how selfish I am, to think of myself only,” she added, breaking off. “How are you? How do you feel since you have lost your husband?”

“The same as ever—even poverty has not altered me.”

“Poverty! you are poor now.”

“Yes! do you not know it? Monsieur Osborne wrote to me to offer me his services, but there was nothing to be done: the want of a slight formality in my husband’s will has reduced me to beggary. His heirs, however, have agreed to allow me a little pittance, which I have agreed to accept; but for your husband, I should not, I believe, have even that. It is little; but it is sufficient to my wants: I live upon it with my cousin, Madame Gérard, whom you remember. She is old, pious, quiet. Monsieur Osborne can tell you how he found us sitting together by a calm fireside, when he called this morning; she knitting, and I reading aloud to her the lives of the saints.”

“Ah! I did not know you had grown poor!”

said Adèle, with much emotion ; “ I did not know it.”

“ And what matter if I have ?” said Madame Lascours, with sad resignation. “ My riches gave me no pleasure, and their memory is full of bitterness : I am haunted with the reproachful eyes, I ever hear the murmuring voices, of the poor, whom I forgot in my prosperity. It is not, God knows, that I would not have helped them ; but I did not like to trouble my husband—as if he the most generous of men, and above all generous to me, would have minded it. And so I let the time pass by, and now that it is too late, Jesus Christ upbraids me that he was hungry and I fed him not, that he was cold and that I did not cover him, that he was in prison and yet was never visited by me. And what is sadder than all,” added Alice, after a brief pause, “ is that I feel, that if I again had the power I should again not know how to use it. Alas ! God help me ! I can aspire to the most sublime heights ; I can pine for the most divine flights ; but a bird without wings might as well think to fly, as I to soar above this miserable earth to heaven. But why talk of all this ?” she exclaimed, with a low sigh ; “ it is one of my miserable weaknesses, that I must ever murmur and repine at myself. I came here not to talk of my shortcomings, but to see you. Your husband is very uneasy about you. You are certainly thinner. What ails you ?”

“ Nothing,” a little shortly replied Adèle ; “ I am happy, quite happy. He is fond of me, as kind as

a man can be, and though I am not very good, I like him too. What more is wanted for happiness?"

"Truly nothing," said Madame Lascours, with a sigh. "And you are either the happiest of women or the most unreasonable."

Adèle reddened and laughed.

"I suppose it must be the happiest," she said; "for truly I would change lots with no living creature. But what am I dreaming of?" she added, with a sudden start; "why there is no room ready for you—and, of course, *he* has not thought about *that*—good, absent man."

"Yes, he always was absent," said Madame Lascours, smiling; "but I dare say you would like to leave me—go, do what you like, it does not matter—I am at home here, you know: only do not give yourself much trouble for me. Anything will do."

"Yes, yes, I know," said Adèle; "yet if you do not mind, I will go; I shall not stay long away."

She went out, singing gaily. Alice looked at the fire and dreamed sadly. "Every human lot is blest but mine," she thought; "for every one knows how to seize on happiness, and I never did know it, and never shall."

The sound of the opening door made her look round; it was Mr. Osborne who had entered. Alice saw his look search for his wife, and she said, quietly:

"Adèle is gone to prepare a room for me—she will soon come back."

Mr. Osborne sat down on the low couch by her side. He leaned his elbow on his knee and looked at the fire.

"She is altered, is she not?" he said.

"Not so much as I expected," replied Madame Lascours; "she looks both cheerful and happy, and I am sure she is. She told me, of her own accord, that she would not change lots with living creature, and if she said it she felt it."

Mr. Osborne did not reply; but still looking at the fire, he thought: "No more in her friend than in her husband will she confide. In that quarter there is, it seems, no hope." For he began to understand a little the proud obstinacy which Adèle concealed under the gentle and wayward aspect of a careless girl. He knew, that if she had begun by saying to Alice that she would change lots with none, she would not retract the words by a later confession. He had hoped the contrary; he had hoped that she would open her mind and her heart to a woman, as he could scarcely expect that she would open them to him, and he was disappointed and provoked to find that it was not and would not be so. "Foolish child," he thought; "she will regret all this too late." He looked up to address some civil and quiet remark to his companion, then suddenly changed his purpose.

Alice sat listlessly, with her hands clasped on her knees, and her eyes raised up and fixed on a miniature portrait of the late William Osborne before her. Mr. Osborne saw that pure and clear profile, those dark eyes so sweet in their sadness, those half-parted

lips that seemed to smile at grief, and he remembered the past, her life and his with a pang.

"Yes," he said, in a low voice, "we two might have had a different destiny but for him, might we not, Alice?"

She did not answer one word.

He continued:

"The past is past, and beyond remedy; yours has not, I fear, been very happy. I need not tell you what mine was: wretched and bitter; truly Providence avenged you well."

"Do not think of that," she said, gently, "I never did think of it once; and I see with joy, that if your past has been sad, your present is blest."

Mr. Osborne looked a little impatient, and something he would have said, too, but Alice quickly laid her finger on her lips, and looking like her in the large mirror above the mantel-piece, he saw the figure of Adèle standing in the gloom of the half-open door.

She came forward, and sat down on the other side of Alice. Her husband looked at her attentively, and a little moodily, too. He did not believe in that gay voice with which Adèle spoke to her friend; behind that glittering eye and flushed cheek he saw the sad look and pale face.

"Foolish child," he thought again, "she will repent it when it is too late. I had my hour with Alice, and I took it not, and years of woe expiated that one brief error. She, too, has her hour with me now, and if she lets it pass by, how will it all end? God alone knows. I know but this; more

than I have done I cannot do ; once for all, I leave her to Time, the grand consoler—to Time, who effaces all troubles and all wrongs—to Time, who has cured the sorrows of six thousand years.”

Early the next morning Mr. Osborne left Courcelles for Paris, where vexatious and troublesome affairs detained him two months. Does absence, like time, work wonders ? Alice, with whom Mr. Osborne kept a private correspondence, gave good tidings of Adèle. Her strength had returned first, then her gaiety, then her good looks. Repeatedly she urged him to return, and become convinced that she did not exaggerate or draw too favourable a picture. At length arrived the time when he could judge for himself. Without previous warning or announcement, he suddenly left Paris, where he had nothing to keep him, and set off for Courcelles. He reached Nantua on a clear and calm April afternoon, hired a boat, and crossed over the lake to his old Manor of Courcelles. A rich, soft sunlight was descending upon the landscape and the lake ; the sky rapidly grew bright and burning, clouds, of bronze and gold, looked like the fabled horses of the sun, leading away his car to rest behind the mountain. The reddening front of Courcelles rose above its skirting garden of light, spring green ; feebly and idly the waters of the lake washed the basement of rock and wall, but the garden was lone as any enchanted garden. No dreaming Adèle was leaning over the balustrade, counting the pebbles in the water. Mr. Osborne landed, dismissed his boat, and entered his garden unseen.

He went on without meeting a living creature, until he reached the alley that led to the conservatory. There he first heard, then he saw, Adèle and Lilian. He stood pretty much in the same spot where he had stood when he had heard his wife wishing herself dead—that is to say, below the level of the raised alley which led to the conservatory; and then, as on that sad day, he could see Adèle and not be seen.

She sat on the last of the stone steps, and Lilian sat by her. She was telling her little step-daughter a fairy tale, of which Mr. Osborne only heard the end.

“And so Prince Charmant, having delivered the princess from the tower, where the fairies kept her, took her away to his own land, and made her queen of all he had.”

“Queen of all he had! what does that mean?” asked Lilian.

“Why, I am queen of all Monsieur Osborne has. Do you understand that?”

But Lilian had already forgotten her question, and was looking at a bee flying through the air, heavily laden, and evidently late and anxious. Lilian, even more ignorant than Anacreon’s Love, called it an animal with wings, and wanted to know all about it.

“His name is Bee, and I know no more, replied Adèle, who looked lazy; “give me a kiss, and go and fetch my round hat.”

She sank down on the sunny stone, reckless of her rich silk skirt of pale violet and delicate white mus-

lin body. Her head rested on the step above that on which she lay with her loosened hair falling down and sweeping it idly, and no softer pillow than her clasped hands, beneath it; Lilian laughed and embraced her stepmother rather more ardently than could be pleasant, even to the most affectionate of stepmamas, but Adèle felt too comfortable to move in order to resist. She only laughed and said, "Do not," and asked for her hat, which Lilian at length condescended to go and fetch.

The child had climbed up the flight of steps with the slow toil of short legs; the sound of her little feet running through the conservatory above had ceased, and Adèle still lay in the sun graceful, indolent, and flushed. For a while she watched the orange light passing away from the deep vivid green of a clipped yew, then she closed her dazzled eyes and sank in the sweet and delightful torpor that creeps to our very hearts on mild, sunny evenings. Truly Madame Lascours had not exaggerated. Adèle looked well, strong, pretty, and happy.

Suddenly she started up pale and frightened, light and insidious though his approach had been, his wife had heard him. Mute was now her greeting as he stood smiling by her side.

"I alarmed you," said Mr. Osborne, rather sorry.

"You startled me; but I knew it was you, of course."

But his concern increased, for she stood before him trembling from head to foot. He drew her towards him and said still smiling, he thought her nerves were stronger.

“Nerves ! I have no nerves !”

She tried to laugh, but could not ; deeply, strangely disturbed was her whole aspect ; it expressed neither joy nor welcome, nothing but an emotion which she evidently could not control, and which Mr. Osborne could not understand. He took her hand and looked at her rather sadly.

“Well, Adèle,” he said, “what ails you?”

Her colour returned ; she laughed, threw her arms around his neck, and said gaily,—

“Why do you come like your own ghost?”

“Then I did alarm you?”

“Yes—no—I do not think you did. Let me go for Lilian.”

“I do not want Lilian, but you ; let me look at you, child,—you look quite well again.”

He turned her face to the fading light and surveyed her tenderly. He was pleased, he was happy to find her looking not merely as well as ever, but infinitely better and prettier. We love everything in what we love : its beauty, its weakness, its infirmity, all are dear, and dear to Mr. Osborne for this most excellent reason, were his wife’s good looks. He would not let her leave him, nor did she any longer strive to go ; she sat down with him on the steps, she laid her head on his shoulder, she played with his hair, and, what pleased him better, for she pulled it rather more than he liked, she answered all his questions with gay frankness.

“How has Isabella behaved?” he asked ; “tell me the whole truth, Adèle.”

“Isabella and I have not exchanged twenty super-

fluous words since you left. In these twenty words there was not one that could in the least annoy me. Oh ! you may look as piercingly, as penetratingly as you like," she added, gaily, "it is so."

"And Mrs. Osborne?"

"Civil, without pity."

"Of course Monsieur de Launay and his aunt have paid all due respect to the mistress of the house?"

"Of course. Anna is a little jealous of Alice, and still keeps her room; Lilian is very much grown, and is a good girl, and that is really all."

"And what about yourself? Your letters have been marvellously laconic on that subject."

"What was there to say? I read, I worked you a chair, I got your letters and answered them, and that is all."

"And all is well now, Adèle, is it not?"

They had risen. His two hands rested on her shoulders; his look, fond and serene, rested on her flushed face.

"Oh, yes, all is well," she stammered.

"Thank God, Adèle! thank God! we will, then, have that greatest of all blessings—domestic peace; he was going to add, but finding the word too cool, he altered it with a smile and said, "domestic bliss."

Adèle did not reply.

"You are very cool," he said.

"Am I?" she asked; and with a sort of hesitation that amused him, she passed her arm within his and tried to become affectionate; but she withdrew it quickly, reddened, and looked indignant.

"You are laughing at me," she said; "I know you are."

He protested he was not, and succeeded in pacifying her; but even as he spoke, his eye measured her from head to foot.

"I declare you have grown," he said, much amused, "a full inch, by your skirt."

"Well, why should I not grow?"

"I might reply, that where there is so little room for improvement."

"Yes, but you would not mean it?"

"Why not?"

"Here is Lilian," was his wife's only reply. "Make haste, Lilian—quick—quick!—he is come back."

But Lilian had all but forgotten her father; she kissed him indeed, but did not seem sure of his identity; and she was much more anxious to give Adèle her straw hat than to welcome her papa. He did not care about her coolness; he told her to go in; and with the intimation that the evening was chill, he led his wife in too. She seemed rather reluctant to enter the house.

"Madame Osborne and Isabella are out," she said, hesitatingly.

"So much the better," he promptly answered.

"Would you not like to go to Anna's room?"

"Not yet."

"Alice is gone to see Madame Gérard. I do not know when she will come back."

"Do we want company?" he asked, as the door closed on Lilian; for after crossing the conservatory,

they were now entering the drawing-room. Mr. Osborne sat down on a couch, and made his wife sit by him. She looked disturbed, yet not displeased; her agitation struck him, and brought a slight flush to his cheek; for if Adèle looked like anything just then, she looked like a girl in love who remains alone with the man she loves. She is glad, of course, but she would give anything to be miles away. Mr. Osborne remembered how quickly she had recognized him, yet how shy and quiet had been her greeting, and he looked at her with a keenness of which he was not conscious. The blood rose to her brow and branded her guilty. But Mr. Osborne had been mistaken once by these deluding signs, and Pride warned him not to fall into a second humiliating error. He took no notice of his wife's emotion; and to give her time to recover, he was beginning a grave discourse, when the door opened, and Madame Lascours entered, and behind her Jeannette bearing the lamp, and beaming with smiles.

Mr. Osborne rose and welcomed Alice with a cordiality which surprised his wife; for rarely in his letters had he mentioned her name.

"How well you look," he said, half-admiringly.

Madame Lascours looked, indeed, handsomer than ever; perhaps it was her dark attire; perhaps it was the full, clear light of the lamp, as she stood with her white hand resting on the table, that gave her beauty a vivid Venetian glow. Even Adèle was dazzled. "She is wonderfully beautiful," she thought, "I wonder what he thinks of her? I must ask him."

"Courcelles agrees with me," simply replied Alice.

"I have not yet been able to settle that matter for you in Paris," he continued, "but I have not lost all hope."

"If I succeed, I shall owe all to you," said Madame Lascours.

The truth flashed across Adèle—her husband and Alice had corresponded privately. These two whom she loved so much had had secrets—only business secrets, indeed—but still, secrets from which she, the wife, the friend, was excluded. She remembered how Alice had laid her finger on her lips on the evening of her arrival.

Ay, they had secrets.

"How did you find Adèle looking?" continued Madame Lascours, laying her hand on the shoulder of her friend.

Mr. Osborne rested his hand too on the other shoulder of his wife, and he looked down at her fondly. He did not answer in speech the question Alice had put; but his look told plainly the pleased admiration Pride would not let him confess.

Adèle looked from one to the other, and smiled.

"What am I between them both?" she thought—"a child!"

"How long is it since you have been on the lake?" asked Mr. Osborne, bending over her.

"Not once since we were married."

"Well, then, I shall take you and Madame Lascours there to-morrow. I saw something to-day which I wish to show you."

“ Did you—did you really ?” cried Adèle eagerly.
“ Ah, how delightful it will be !”

She laughed ; she was merry. Mr. Osborne and Alice exchanged pleased looks.

“ All is well,” he thought, truly happy, “ all is well. It was a light grief—light has been the cure.”

CHAPTER XIX.

THE FIRST OF MAY.

BRIGHT and joyous, like a first of May morning, rose the next day, which was, indeed, a first of May. Soft and warm was the rosy sky; the mountains had a look of tranquil rest, the lake slept, whilst sunbeams crept over it, and from the wide old garden there rose many a joyous song of love and delight, many a merry carol, which a happy bird poured forth, not knowing why.

Mr. Osborne walked up and down the alley, where he had found his wife the preceding evening. His arms were folded, his look was bent; he had come there for solitude, but solitude he did not find. Mrs. Osborne walked down the steps, and met him graciously.

“My dear William, how are you?” she said, extending her hand; “I am glad, I am truly glad you are come back.”

Courteously, though very coldly, Mr. Osborne returned her greeting.

“I hope you found Adèle and Lilian both looking

well," she pursued. "The change in your wife I consider amazing."

"She looks very well."

"And I hope, William, that she has told you that none of those unhappy mistakes—I really can call them nothing else—which arose formerly between Isabella—"

"We will not speak of that," he interrupted; "Adèle is very far from complaining."

"You gratify me. It has been my object in life to pass calmly and happily through the most perplexing ;—but I see you are full of other matters—good morning."

She bent her calm and handsome head, and walked away, undetained by her step-son. She had scarcely left the alley, when Isabella, blooming and gay, stepped in, like a Dryad, through an opening of the hedge, and appeared before her brother.

"Good morning to your Lordship!" she said, gaily.

"Good morning, Isabella," he gravely replied.

"Yes; but I am come to say something beside good morning," she said, pertly. "I suppose you bring news. What are they, if you please?"

"My affairs in Paris are over, at least, for the time. There is nothing to delay the partnership now."

The eyes of Isabella sparkled.

"Is that all?" she asked.

"Not quite. I wrote to Madame de Launay last night, and her answer has come. She and her nephew will come to-morrow, and spend a week here."

Isabella drew a deep breath, and looked relieved.

"At length," she said, "we shall have a real conclusion. I was beginning to think I should not dance at the Tuileries next winter, I really was. How solemn you look, William; you are not angry with me, are you?"

"What for?" he asked.

"Why, about that little affair I had with Adèle, before you left," she bluntly replied. "I know you were desperately angry then. I suppose you thought I had half killed her! William, women, and girls too, are made of harder stuff. Look at your wife's blooming cheeks and bright eyes; listen to her when she laughs, and ask yourself if *I* broke her heart."

"Certainly not," he answered, in a peculiar tone, "certainly not, Isabella. She has improved amazingly during my absence. I never saw her look so well as I saw her look yesterday evening, when I found her lying here on these stone steps."

"Yes, she rather likes that style!" said Isabella, with a curling lip.

"It is a style that suits her; she is little, graceful, and supple. Even you, Isabella, would have admired my wife, if you had seen her so. It was not prejudice, I assure you; but I thought I had never seen such a pretty, happy-looking little creature."

"Good morning," said Isabella, haughtily, "I came to talk on business, not on your wife's beauty."

"My wife's beauty!" internally echoed Mr. Osborne, "my wife's beauty, indeed!"

"The man is mad," thought Isabella, as she walked away; "I wonder if Augustus will go on

raving about me to other people in that style! Pity *he* did not see her lying on the stone steps."

Here she stopped in the narrow path she was pacing, and standing back, she allowed Madame Lascours to pass, scarcely acknowledging her morning salutation with a cool bend of the head. Alice was a great deal too handsome to be in the good graces of Isabella.

"Pray, was it Monsieur Osborne's voice I heard near the conservatory?" asked Madame Lascours.

"It was," was the short and ungracious reply; and Isabella walked on.

Mr. Osborne was ascending the steps when Alice entered the alley; but as he reached the conservatory she stood by his side. With surprise she saw his stern and displeased look—very different from the happy serene face of the preceding evening.

"It is a fine day," she began.

"Remarkably so."

"Adèle is not here?"

"No, her head aches."

"How well she looks, does she not?"

"Wonderfully well."

"When I first came here she was pale and languid, but she rallied rapidly, and became stronger, and prettier too, than I ever knew her before."

Mr. Osborne smiled.

"She has been very busy during your absence," pursued Alice; "she has studied, she has read. Books and your letters have been all her delight."

Mr. Osborne smiled again.

A little hesitatingly Madame Lascours said—

“She is young, ardent; and I do believe that to be more worthy of you, as she thinks, has become with her a sort of passion.”

They were walking up and down the conservatory, and as he walked, Mr. Osborne carelessly hit the heads of his tallest plants something like King Tarquin in his garden. Suddenly he paused, and confronting Alice, he said, briefly—

“She cried herself to sleep last night, and if you see her this morning, look at her well.”

“And what did she cry for?” asked Alice, amazed.

“God knows! She did not think I was awake. I did not ask. I scarcely think it was with joy for my return.”

Madame Lascours could not speak, she was so astonished. Mr. Osborne did not give her time; he saw Morel coming up the alley; and with a hasty apology to the friend of his wife, he left her, and went to meet his foreman.

“Is she not fond of him, after all?” thought Alice, bewildered; “was she merry and well only because he was away?” But this seemed incredible; Alice could not and would not believe it. At once she went up to the room of her friend. At the door she met Jeannette; she asked how her mistress was?

“Bad—bad,” groaned Jeannette; “all wrong again, all wrong.” And she went down moaning.

Without knocking, Alice entered. Adèle was sitting by her open window, pale, languid, apathetic. The last two months had vanished, and Alice felt

that she gazed again on the sad girl to whom Mr. Osborne had brought her one evening.

She questioned her, and got vague replies; she tried to rouse her, and she failed. Adèle remained listless and cold. Madame Lascours looked out of the window on the garden. At a distance she saw Mr. Osborne re-entering the house; and her heart swelled with a dull pain that was more the child of memory than born of the present. "What!" she thought, "he the good, the perfect, accomplished, handsome gentleman, must love her the child, the mere girl, in vain! His presence which ought to be delightful, his return, which ought to be the fulness of all joy, are the misery and the torment of his wife! Ah, it is too much, it is too much!"

Whilst she was looking at Mr. Osborne, Mr. Osborne's wife was looking at her, moodily.

"Why am I not beautiful, like her?" she thought. "I know that pure, noble style of beauty is that which he most admires! Why am I not like her, an intellectual, accomplished woman? I am clever in my way, but I know nothing. He never could take, in talking to me, the pleasure he took in talking to her last night. Why am I not like her, perfect and good? For myself I am just as well pleased to be as I am; but for him what a difference it would make to have a wife like her, instead of a wife like me. And can he help, too—ah, can he help, when he sees us both together—can he help making a comparison between us?"

"Well, what are you thinking of?" anxiously asked Alice, turning back to Adèle.

"I was wishing to be like you," she replied, with the frankness which she was ever but too prompt to display at her own expense; "I do believe, Alice, you have every gift a woman can have—rare beauty, mind, virtue, goodness, everything!"

"But the power to make use of those gifts," interrupted Alice, reddening slightly, "everything but the gift to charm. The good fairies were generous to me; but the wicked fairy who had not been invited to the christening stepped in, and said—You have given her mind, it shall be powerless to please her or others; you have given her the love of goodness, I will destroy in her the power of doing good; and, finally, you have given her beauty; I decree that her beauty shall waken the cold admiration of every eye, and never the love of one heart."

"Ah, bah!" said Adèle, trying to smile, "William spoke to me so learnedly about your Greek profile last night, that I thought—he is fond of me, of course, but I wonder if he would not like me more if I too had a Greek profile? Altogether I can tell you he admires you amazingly."

"Pray never tell me that he does," said Alice, with unusual warmth, "or that any one does admire me," she added, so sadly that Adèle was struck; "it is like talking to exiles of their country; it is a pleasure; yes, but it is also a pain too keen. Ah, why did we talk of all this?" she continued, pressing her hand to her forehead; "what was I saying?—yes, let me see, that it is a beautiful morning, and that you must really rouse yourself, were it only for the sake of its being the first of May."

“The first of May!” cried Adèle, with a sudden start; “it is the first of May! Are you sure? Are you not jesting?”

“It is the first of May, there is no doubt about it.”

Adèle got up, clapped her hands, and laughed.

“I am seventeen to-day,” she cried, “I am seventeen to-day! I will be as merry as a lark until midnight. I will really be happy and joyous the whole of this day, and perhaps a little bit of to-morrow too. What do you say to this wise resolve?”

“Keep to it,” replied Madame Lascours, smiling at her sudden mirth.

“Of course I shall. I will prove it to you and to him too. Where is he? below writing; he little expects me. But first, how do I look?—Well, eh?” she added, with a doubtful look at Alice.

“You look very well,” was the quiet but encouraging reply. And it was true, for with Adèle to feel happy and look beautiful were one.

“Then adieu to you, I am gone.”

She darted out of her room, then down the staircase, and broke in on her husband in his study, light and joyous.

“I am seventeen to-day!” she cried, breathlessly; “I have just found it out, and I am come to tell you.”

He looked at her doubtfully. What fit was this?

“Well,” she impatiently exclaimed, “you are not amazed, surprised, delighted, to have a wife who is seventeen on the first of May!”

“I am a calm man,” he replied, smiling; “and I take great blessings calmly. Nevertheless, come nearer, let me see how you look on your seventeenth birthday.”

She obeyed and went up to him, he passed his left arm around her, and looked so kindly in her face, that her lids fell, though she still smiled. “I must be mad,” she thought, “not to see that he is fond of me.”

“You did not warn me,” he said; “wonder not that I have no gift for this great day; but I shall repair the omission in due time.”

“You could give me your ring,” said Adèle, quickly.

Youth is full of fond, foolish fancies which maturer years smile at. Mr. Osborne wore a signet ring, an antique found in a tomb in Greece, and on which two hands, one of a woman the other of a man, were engraved in the act of clasping. With it he sealed all his private letters. Was it, as Mr. Osborne fondly thought, the work of the famous Dioscourides? We know nothing about it, but this we know, that Adèle had set her heart on getting that ring from him.

“If he gives it to me freely,” she thought, “it is a sign that he really loves me; if he hesitates, I shall know that he likes me, and no more.”

Now Mr. Osborne being a hesitating man, there were ten chances to one that the unexpected request of Adèle would make him wonder and pause, but the one chance was favourable to her; without hesitation he took the ring from his finger and put in on

hers. It was too large, but Adèle did not think of that; her eyes sparkled with joy, her face beamed with smiles, she threw her arms around him, and embraced him warmly.

“Oh! I am going to be so good and so happy to-day,” she cried, “you will see. I shall speak to Isabella and Mr. Osborne in amity, which I thought never to do again, I assure you; but I must be in peace with the whole world on the day when I am seventeen, must I not?”

“Of course,” he replied; but internally he thought, “all this is very charming, very sweet; but how long will it last?”

It lasted the whole of that day.

Ah! youth, lovely youth made to charm, fleeting gift we slight, or regret and never prize when we hold it, is there, indeed, a heart so cold as not to delight in thee, even when thou art lost and gone. Mr. Osborne was anything but pleased with his wife. Her sudden sadness, her tears, had offended him deeply; but when she came to him in her smiles beaming like the morning, when he saw her sunny face, when he heard her light voice about the house, his displeasure melted away, even as his eyes softened, even as unconscious sweetness tempered the irony of his smile. It was the first of May, and she was seventeen, atoning virtues that effaced the very memory of her sins.

Faithfully Adèle kept to her resolve of being in amity with her mother and sister-in-law. She went to find them in the Hall, and was both cordial and gay. Mrs. Osborne was gentle and dignified; Isa-

bella was good-humoured enough. She spoke of her approaching marriage, condescended to consult Adèle on one or two trousseau questions, then abruptly observed,—

“And when is Madame Lascours going?”

“Not yet, I hope.”

“You are very fond of her?”

“Isabella, my love,” imploringly put in Mrs. Osborne.

“Surely, mamma, there is no harm in that.”

“I love and admire Alice,” said Adèle, warmly; she is a beautiful creature, is she not?”

“You are generous,” was the ironical reply.

“What, do you not think her handsome?”

“I think her humble.”

Mrs. Osborne gave her daughter a warning look, and Isabella answered it in speech.

“Oh, you need not be afraid. I have had enough of interfering.” And she spoke again of her trousseau.

Adèle left them and went up to Anna’s room. Anna was very cross. She felt neglected and wronged, and Anna was never silent under wrong.

“You have quite forsaken me,” she said, querulously; “and all for the sake of your new friend.”

“She is an old friend, Anna.”

“And when is she going away?”

“I will not let her go away,” said Adèle, impatiently; “I want her here.”

“But it cannot be pleasant to her to be here,” sharply said Anna.

Adèle looked surprised ; and Anna looked like one that had committed a blunder.

“ You know well enough,” she said, “ that this is not a pleasant house.”

Adèle did not question her, she pacified Anna, and left her apparently unmoved and unconscious, but she seized the first opportunity she got in the afternoon to say to Madame Lascours,—

“ Alice, is it true that it is unpleasant for you to be in this house with me ?”

They were crossing the court on their way to the garden where Mr. Osborne, who had been engaged with business the whole day, was waiting to take them on the lake. On hearing the question of Adèle, Alice stopped short near the old well, and looked down at her friend and said drearily,—

“ What have they been saying to you ?”

Adèle, sorry to have spoken, reddened, but did not reply.

“ Can they not let me be in peace, after so many years,” said Madame Lascours, clasping her trembling hands.

“ Oh ! I am sorry—I am very sorry to have said a word !” cried Adèle, really pained.

Alice laid her hand on the shoulder of her young friend, and pressed the other to her heart.

“ The cold water in that cold well,” she said, “ is not colder than I am now ; it is not more calm, more deadly still ; but if you throw a stone in it, it will be troubled ; and thus it is with me—the past is past and dead, but a word breaks the stillness of years.”

“I shall never say another word to you—never—never!” cried Adèle; “forgive me—tell me you are not angry.”

Alice stooped and kissed her.

“I have always loved you,” she said; “but if they should again speak—again try to divide us. Remember, Adèle, that I have never loved you more than I love you now.”

They crossed the court and entered the garden, where they found Mr. Osborne sitting on a bench, waiting. The day was still warm and beautiful, but it was waning, and Adèle wore a thin muslin dress.

“Jeannette,” said Mr. Osborne, “will you go and fetch the cloak of your mistress, if you please?”

Jeannette, who was sitting at some distance, rose and left her wheel to obey at once. Adèle looked after her a little remorsefully. She seemed to have become estranged from her old friend of late, and on this day, her birthday too, she had not so much as spoken to her. She turned to her husband, and said:

“I wish you would take Alice to the orchard, and show her those beautiful apple trees you spoke of to me. I feel a little tired, and I shall sit here and wait for you. Then when Jeannette has brought me my cloak, and you are come back, we can go on the lake.”

Madame Lascours looked as if she would have objected; but Adèle frowned at her.

“This is my birthday,” she said, “and I must be obeyed.”

They went—she looked after them, and sighed, but not with grief.

“What sorrow is going to befall me,” she thought, “that I feel so overflowing with happiness. Oh! I am young, very young still, and life is very sweet. He is so good, so kind, so fond of me, spite all my capricious ways. He has made me the mistress of this old house, where, till he came, I was no better than a stranger; the garden is mine now, the beautiful old garden, the orchard too, every good gift, every blessing, came with him, the greatest of all blessings. Blessed be the good, kind God that gave him to me, and me to him.”

Her hands lay clasped on her knees, smiling at her own thoughts, she looked at the sunny old garden with its crown of dark hills, at the warm flushed sky above them; the whole earth was a temple wherein it was sweet and delightful to worship and to love.

“Here is Madame’s cloak,” said the subdued voice of Jeannette, “shall I put it on?”

Adèle nodded, and when the cloak was on her, she threw her arms around Jeannette’s neck and kissed her brown cheek.

“What sort of a cloak did Madame wear this day seventeen years?” she asked, gaily.

Jeannette smiled, and shook her head.

“Ah! Jeannette!” cried Adèle, in the fulness of her heart, “blessed be the day on which I was born, to be made the happy woman I am to-day.”

Jeannette looked earnestly at her young mistress.

No more than Mr. Osborne, could she understand a change so sudden from melancholy to joy; and, like him, she thought: "Let it but last."

"Monsieur and Madame Lascours are coming back," she said.

Adèle unwound her arms from the neck of Jeannette, and looked round. Mr. Osborne and Alice were coming up the alley. Adèle looked at them like one in a dream. They paused in the path and exchanged some remark which she was too far to hear. The sunlight fell on them both, it played around their two figures with a glorious glow that dazzled her. Yet she saw them well, with the keen and vivid distinctness which great light gives to objects. She saw their looks meet, she saw them smile, and it seemed as if looks and smiles were blending into one. A strange, keen thrill ran through the whole being of Adèle. She turned round, and said to Jeannette with a suddenness of which she was not herself conscious:

"Who was it Alice was to marry before she became Monsieur Lascours' wife?"

Jeannette was taken by surprise and looked troubled, too troubled indeed to reply at once.

"Madame must not think of that now," she said, at length.

Adèle laughed.

"You do not think I mind what took place when I was a little girl," she said, gaily, "besides I am his wife, and she is nothing to him you know."

She paused and looked at Jeannette, perhaps she

expected a contradiction : she got none ; for Jeannette did not speak. Adèle pressed her two hands against each other with some force, and looked from Jeannette to the two figures now coming towards her ; then she shook her head like one who forbids thought to come, and lightly sprang forward to meet them. Her husband received her with a smile, and looked down pleased at her flushed cheeks and bright eyes. Alice, too, smiled, but like one who looks on apart.

“ You see, I have not lost what you call my old liveliness,” said Adèle.

“ You look feverish,” he replied, a little anxiously. Adèle took hold of his hand, and half frowned.

“ What did you say ?” she asked.

“ I said you looked feverish.”

Adèle took his little finger, and put it between teeth, which might be teeth of pearl, but which had the qualities of most teeth, and could bite.

“ There !” she said, dropping his hand, and laughing to see him shake it rather ruefully, “ every time you say I am feverish I shall serve you so.”

And an emphatic nod confirmed her words. Mr. Osborne turned to Alice and smiled.

“ She is seventeen to-day,” he said, and he fondly stroked the head of his young wife.

Adèle took his arm, and looked up at him with strange earnest eyes, but she said nothing. They walked down the broad alley until they reached the stone steps that led to the water. The boat was ready, they entered it, and Mr. Osborne rowed

them away into the centre of the lake. The sun was setting behind the mountains ; dark was their broken edge on clouds of gold, red and yellow streaks passed across a pale aërial sky of fading blue, long lines of light streamed along the lake, but sombre, full of mystery and gloom, looked the waters that washed the stone base of the austere mountains round.

“ What a beautiful evening,” said Alice.

“ Divine,” said Mr. Osborne, letting his oar lie idle.

Alice sat with her hands clasped in her lap, and her eyes upraised, and he sat looking at her with unexpressed, but evident admiration.

“ Why am I not with the old man in his grave ?” thought Adèle ; “ he divided them whilst he lived, even as I divide them now. He is happy and at rest, after his long, sad life ; why am I not like him, after my little life, so sad, though so short ?”

Mr. Osborne had resumed his oar, the boat was moving on. Adèle bent over it, and looked into the still water. She saw a pale sky, and dark mountains for ever moving on, and alone unchangeable her own sad face. She smiled at it, and thought, “ If, instead of her image, it was Adèle herself, that lay far down in the bottom of that lake, I wonder what they would feel ! Alice would regret me, I know she would ; he, too, would be sorry ; yes, he would, indeed ; but old love, first-love, never dies. Before a year, Alice would be his wife ; Lilian would love

her as she loves me now. And who would think of little Adèle then?"

Her tears fell fast in the calm lake; they troubled its still surface, and broke her image with tremulous circles. With a sort of despair, she, too, looked up at the sky. "God is good," she thought; "He will either help me to bear, or He will take me away from this misery."

"Is it this we have come to see?" asked Alice, in a tone of surprise.

The boat had stopped; it had neared land, and was heaving gently in a narrow bay. At once Adèle knew the spot, for before her, with a bluish background of mountains, trees, and mist, rose, above the rocky shore and rugged path, the grey old church, in which she had been married. Half of the low-arched door was open; she saw the altar within, with a streak of sunshine lighting it up; she saw the iron railing, before which they had knelt—the rows of tombs that rose above the surface of the stone floor, through which they had passed; and looking up above the porch, she saw, too, that the belfry had got its promised bell.

Madame Lascours had stepped out; her sombre figure was entering the church; they were alone in the boat, with the dark and silent lake around them. Half shyly, half freely, Adèle went up to her husband and kissed his cheek, like a good and grateful little girl.

"What were you crying for last night?" he asked, gravely.

"I shall not cry any more," she said, reddening, "I am seventeen, so good-bye to tears."

She sprang on shore; he followed her more slowly. He felt vexed with himself that he could not be angry with her; that, do what she would to irritate or provoke him, this mere child ever found the way back to his heart.

They entered the church together; Madame Las-cours was kneeling in the half-gloom of a heavy pillar; they went up to the altar; before it burned reverently a feeble little lamp, that mingled its red glow with the gorgeousness and the splendour of the setting sun.

Adèle knelt down by the railing, but she could not pray, for prayer is an act of the heart, as well as of the will, and her heart would not obey the bended knees and moving lips. She could, indeed, shade her eyes with her hand, and not look at her husband, who stood before her, reading an inscription on one of the tombstones, but she could not prevent the inward vision from beholding him again on their marriage morning standing before that altar, calm, proud, handsome, and happy.

"A perfect man," she thought, involuntarily looking up; but Mr. Osborne was going and Alice stood on the door-step beckoning to her with a smile. Adèle rose, followed her out, and entered the boat without a word.

Mr. Osborne and Alice spoke about the church and praised what they called its character. Their discourse was architectural and artistic; Adèle heard

them subdued and silent. What did she know or care about that church, save that it was the church in which she had been married?

They reached the garden and landed. The evening was beautiful and mild; instead of taking the broad alley, they entered a side path which brought them to the old lime-tree. It was in bloom, and its blossoms filled the air with perfume. Mr. Osborne had had a bench placed beneath it. With some eagerness Adèle said,—

“Let us sit down—pray do.”

Reluctantly he yielded, for he feared she might take cold; yet serene and mild was that May evening. The pale, full moon had arisen; her soft yellow light fell like a golden veil on the opposite arbour, and its statue no longer shrouded with snow.

“On such a moonlight night as this we went to the Roche aux Fées some years ago,” suddenly said Mr. Osborne, speaking to Alice across his wife, who sat between them; “do you remember?”

Alice said she remembered,—Adèle, too, remembered. She remembered her wedding-day and the snow-storm that had found them both under that old lime-tree; she remembered the snow flakes in her hair, where the soft breeze passing in the boughs above, now shed the fragrant lime-blossoms; she remembered her husband bending over her raised face, and for the first time, embracing her; she remembered all this, and with the unreasonableness of strong feeling, she forgot that on her wed-

ding-day she had been anything but happy. She forgot that his tenderness had dismayed her, that she had looked with heart-sickness, and fainting, and dread, to that future which was to be spent for ever with him. She effaced all that from memory, she left nothing there but his fleeting fondness, but the joy so serene, though as yet it now seemed so delusive, that shone on his aspect. And with a bitter pang she said to herself, "If he had known then that Alice was a widow, would he have married me? He would not—he could not." She looked at them both; she knew they did not wrong her, even in thought; she felt as incapable of jealousy as they were of the perfidy that would have justified the feeling, but she felt, too, that her husband had loved the woman who sat by her side as he could not love her; she felt that that woman had a power of giving him happiness denied to her; and again looking at them both, good, handsome, made for each other and severed by her, she felt that her heart was breaking. "I must die," she thought; "life is too bitter to drink thus drop by drop."

The stillness of evening leads to silence; none of those three spoke. A nightingale began to sing in the tree above them. He sang his love and its joys, and Adèle felt as if she could sing not her love, but her sorrows. Without warning, without prelude, she sank her head on her husband's shoulder, and clasping his hand in hers, and with her other hand in that of Alice, she began one of the old ballads

which she loved. It told in rude speech and with a monotonous chaunt the sad story of an unloved wife whom her husband cast away. Surprise kept Mr. Osborne mute ; he had never heard Adèle sing before, save by snatches, and he did not know that she possessed a voice of rare sweetness and beauty.

And as she sang that evening Adèle had never sung before and never sang again, for she sang from the depths of a suffering heart. Sweeter than the now silent note of the nightingale rose her voice on the calm of the night. Mr. Osborne was keenly alive to beautiful sounds ; with silent delight he listened to that old ballad which his young wife sang so sweetly on his shoulder, and Adèle did not pause ; stanza after stanza of the complaint fell from her lips, and each sounded sweeter than the last. But when she reached the saddest part of her story, the casting away of the unloved wife by her husband, the voice of Adèle took a tone of lament so sad and so strange, that it pierced the hearts of the two rapt listeners.

“ For Heaven’s sake do not sing so,” cried Mr. Osborne ; “ sing no more.”

“ Pray do not,” anxiously said Alice.

Adèle looked at them both ; the light of the moon fell on their two faces ; his eyes were dim ; her tears were flowing ; she smiled, and sang pale and tearless until the end. Then, indeed, she looked at her husband in such a sad, despairing fashion, that his heart was moved with indignant grief.

“Adèle, what did you promise in the boat?” he asked.

“Am I crying?” she replied.

“God help us both!” he said, rising, and he walked away.

“Adèle,” said Madame Lascours, “what is all this? What ails you? Why do you torment him? What is it? Can you not be happy?”

“No,” replied Adèle, a little passionately; “there it is, Alice, I cannot—I cannot.”

END OF VOL. II.

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